

the covid chronicles

PAUL LITTLE

LESSONS FROM NEW ZEALAND

 HarperCollins *Publishers*

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DEDICATION

For Lila and Emmie

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Dedication

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Introduction

This is not the story of New Zealand's response to the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. It is the story of how that pandemic affected several lives, told in their own words. The subjects were chosen because they each had a connection to areas that would be directly affected: government, research, education, media, small business, big business, mental health, social services and others.

When this book was begun, the participants had no idea how their stories would end nor how successful the country's efforts would be in dealing with the threat of the coronavirus. Serendipitously, its deadline coincided with New Zealand's move to Alert Level 1 – life almost as normal. This provided a tidy finish for the book but not, of course, to the story of the pandemic.

The people in these pages were interviewed once a week, starting in Alert Level 4, to record their experiences of the pandemic and its effects on them as they happened. (For biographies, see page 283.)

They are owed a huge debt of thanks. They were all quick to agree, never less than fully involved and always generous with their time as the agreed-upon weekly 10-minute catch-ups invariably stretched to half an hour.

The project was driven by the belief that personal stories, recording and writing in real time, provide a special perspective on history, without the filter of hindsight. Its value was confirmed by my wife's reaction when she read the first draft: 'I'd already forgotten so much of this.'

It was also intended to be a celebration of the New Zealand effort against the virus. When 'we' win the America's Cup or the Rugby World Cup 'we' usually haven't done anything except sit around and watch. When we won the battle against Covid-19 we really did do it together. Without a unified effort, the lockdown would have failed and our coronavirus death toll would have been considerably higher than 22.

'We are still in the middle of a pandemic' was the official message as we moved to Alert Level 1 and as we were reminded when new cases appeared in the country weeks after the last one had been recorded. At the time this is being written, there is no way of knowing what twists and turns the progress of that pandemic may take nationally and internationally before it ends. But for anyone

wondering about its beginning, this is what it was like.

31 December 2019: The World Health Organization reports a cluster of cases of pneumonia in the city of Wuhan, China . . .

CHAPTER 1

Two months to lockdown

**DECEMBER 2019–
FEBRUARY 2020**

December 2019–3 January 2020

44 patients with a mysterious illness are reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) by Chinese authorities. More than half have links to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan.

7 January

Chinese authorities identify a new coronavirus. They record its genetic sequence and make it available internationally to enable the development of diagnostic kits.

13–20 January

Cases of the virus spread from China into Thailand, Japan and South Korea.

23 January

The number of cases has risen to 581, with the virus reported in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and the United States. There have been 17 deaths. Wuhan closes airports, train stations and roads in and out of the city.

24 January

In New Zealand the Ministry of Health sets up a team to monitor the situation but describes the risk of the pandemic reaching the country as low. Australia confirms there are three cases of the virus in that country.

27 January

Public health staff announce they will begin meeting flights from China to look for signs of the virus.

28 January

A National Health Coordination Centre is set up by the Ministry of Health in response to the spread of the virus.

30 January

The government charters an Air New Zealand flight to evacuate New Zealanders from Wuhan.

31 January

The WHO declares the outbreak to be a 'public health emergency of international concern'.

2 February

There are reports that the virus has been transmitted between people who have not visited China.

3 February

The government imposes entry restrictions on foreign nationals travelling to New Zealand from or through China and requires them to self-isolate for 14 days on arrival.

Universities ask that Chinese students travelling here to study be exempt from the restrictions.

6 February

The chartered flight arrives from Wuhan and its 193 passengers are put into 14-day quarantine at a military training camp at Whangaparāoa.

11 February

The WHO names the disease Covid-19, short for 'coronavirus disease 2019'. More than 1000 people have now died from the disease.

17 February

A Chinese tourist in France becomes the first person outside Asia to die after contracting the virus.

19 February

The first case of Covid-19 is reported in Iran. People evacuated from Wuhan to Whangaparāoa are released from quarantine.

24 February

There are 79,331 cases confirmed globally, 2069 of which are outside of China.

26 February

For the first time, there are more new cases reported from countries outside of China (459) than in China (412) in a 24-hour period.

* * *

New Zealanders, isolated and – in our own minds – far from the rest of the world, are nevertheless an outward facing people. Many of us are either overseas, thinking about going overseas or have friends and family established overseas, so we are often more aware than most people of what is happening in countries other than our own.

In the beginning, the coronavirus from Wuhan was just another item in a news report, as likely to be quickly forgotten as any other. In the end, our isolation would prove crucial not just to withstanding it but to overcoming it.

If you knew someone in China, you probably had the benefit of an early warning.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

I was at Waitangi for the Treaty commemorations at the start of February and took a phone call from Rodney Jones, a person I've known for a long time who runs an investment company. Until recently he had lived in China for the best part of 30 years and he is an expert on the country. He was ringing to say he was extremely worried about what was happening in China and that I should be worried about it too. I paid attention to that. I was starting to read a lot about the coronavirus in the newspaper by now.

For most, the news was just another item in a bulletin, but others were immediately aware of its potential significance.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

I was having a family holiday at our bach on Great Barrier Island when news reports began to appear saying there was a new virus in Wuhan, China. Having the job I have, it was on my radar instantly.

Everyone was on holiday at that time. I quickly checked in with Ian Town, the Chief Science Advisor for Health.

Chief science advisors from countries all around the world are in touch with one another anyway, but even more so for events like this. Early in January a small group of us, including those from the UK and USA, got together and agreed this could be really serious and we needed to start thinking about how we could judge just how serious.

Reliable information was hard to come by.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist and science communicator

I must have first heard about the virus in early January, while I was on holiday. As a microbiologist, I'm especially interested in these things. I had been in the UK and travelled back to New Zealand via Hong Kong. I got home on Friday 13 January and by Monday I had been asked to go on TV to talk about this new virus. I had to find out about it pretty quickly. I went to the World Health Organization's website, the website of the Chinese equivalent of the US's Centers for Disease Control and a site called PubMed, where anyone can search for scientific papers. But at that point there were no scientific papers, so I had to go by the WHO's situation reports. Back then, it didn't look as though many healthcare workers had been affected, and that is usually a good sign, so it became a case of watch and wait. And within two weeks it was all on.

The implications soon became all too apparent.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

The size of this crisis was something that only dawned on me slowly in the early stages. I keep a small diary, and on 25 January I wrote 'Virus spreading in China' across the top of the page. I didn't write anything else, but I must have been aware that there was something significant about it for me to write it like that. But it was at a distance and not something I kept track of.

No one knew quite how seriously to take the news.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island – the co-operative that operates Pak'nSave, New World, Liquorland, Gilmours, Four Square and others

My son works in China and was back in New Zealand for the summer holidays, staying over Christmas and through the Chinese New Year. He was due to head back in early February. He is 24 and has an exciting job there. But that connection meant we were aware of Covid-19 as a family and, as the time got closer for him to go back, though we hadn't talked about it, we were getting to the point where we could see what was developing and were going to have to say: 'Sorry, but we don't want you going back.' Fortunately, that decision was taken out of our hands because the New Zealand company he worked for there came out and said they wanted their people to stay in New Zealand. That brought it home to us and we really registered that this was something big then.

It was probably nothing to be very worried about.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie, an international beauty-booking app

I was living in London. Like a lot of people in their forties, I think, I got the news from worried parents. Mum is pretty good at worrying and had been sending me concerned texts about what was going on, telling me I needed to be very aware of the virus. It was January and she was well ahead of the curve. I dismissed it, to be honest. I thought most of it was an over-reaction.

Suddenly, the virus was starting to interfere with people's plans.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

My daughter and I were due to go to Vietnam in early February on a long-planned holiday. About two weeks prior to that, people were starting to express concern about this virus. The concern was focused on the fact that Hanoi was 1500 kilometres from Wuhan, so we were flying into a potential epicentre. But it wasn't a big concern. One or

two people suggested that it might be unwise to go, but most people said they wouldn't worry about it. Then, two days before we were due to fly, Vietnam pulled the plug on all flights from Hong Kong to Vietnam. Overnight, we were not going. We were still adjusting to this a day or so later when they withdrew the ban and the flight was back on.

But if you knew someone on the ground, it was a very different matter.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

One of my colleagues comes from Wuhan. The reports she was giving us in early January were totally different from the sanitised reports in the media. She was saying the virus was a lot worse than we thought it was and were being told. She said her relatives were telling her they were literally stepping over bodies in the street.

From Wuhan to Aotearoa was a long way.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

When I initially heard about the virus, it seemed too far away to make any difference to Aotearoa and then to Hokianga; I really didn't think it would affect us. It all seemed like a bit of a mystery, but there was a little concern around the issue.

Even those in the media didn't assume it would be big news.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

We weren't that concerned at first. Jason Winstanley, our boss, at one of our daily meetings early on said, 'I think today could be the day you talk about the coronavirus.' And the host, Kerre McIvor, and I were like: 'Really? It's quite far away.' It just didn't seem that big then.

But others had good reason to take the news seriously.

Sam Johnson

Chief executive and founder Student Volunteer Army

I've spent a lot of time at international disaster conferences. Pandemics are what they always talk about as being the most difficult things to deal with, so when I first heard about Covid-19 I thought it was going to be huge and that we should probably try to think of what our role in responding to it would be.

I'm used to dealing with health issues. I have worked in the field for two years and had a start-up that did elderly visiting, and my husband works for the DHB (district health board). A friend who worked in health also thought it would be big and prompted me to move quicker than I was imagining. Another said let's collaborate. Then we just started doing things. We stopped our other work and started working on Covid response

Meanwhile, life – and holidays – went on as usual.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

I was on the Gold Coast on holiday in the middle of January. There was the odd little story that I noticed and simply thought, 'Oh yeah – China. It's just another thing in China.' It didn't sound good, but it didn't sound relevant to New Zealand at all. I didn't change my view on that till much later on.

One of the earliest priorities was to work out how likely – if at all – the virus was to reach New Zealand, and work out what – if anything – needed to be done.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

From day one it was an international effort, but from our point of view, at the beginning, it was also a distant threat. We had seen SARS,

which was nasty but didn't become a global pandemic.

The question with this new virus was whether it would go away or would spread widely. In my role, I advise the Prime Minister on scientific matters, but I also connect with whoever I need to in the science community, nationally and internationally, to find out what we should be across and to be aware of threats ahead of anything arriving here.

For something like this, the job is to raise the flag, tell the Prime Minister it is happening, maintain a watching brief and talk to her ministers and senior decision makers. Then, really, I just answer the phone. I am in response mode – here to answer questions. All sorts of people I have day-to-day relationships with call me: 'What does it mean? How serious is it?'

I run an open line for scientists in New Zealand and ask them to call me if they hear anything. They have deep scientific networks in their specialist areas, and they let me know of developments. In the early days of this, I could keep across everything, but the amount of information exploded.

It was also a complex communications challenge for keeping people informed. I keep in contact with science communicators in New Zealand and support them, and they support the wider community by explaining our current understanding of things.

Part of my job is trying to work out what might happen and examining different scenarios. Everything moved incredibly quickly in this case. We were soon looking at closing borders to specific countries.

Meanwhile, we were thinking about what would happen here. A bunch of us were looking closely at how different countries were responding. Every day we looked at the case numbers several times as the situation evolved.

There was exponential transmission, so we could see countries at the beginning of outbreaks and watch the spreading as it was happening. Looking at Italy, I just thought 'holy crap'. And the thing that is very stressful about this virus is the lag there can be between acquiring it and symptoms showing. When we see a case today, it represents an infection that happened two to 10 days ago, up to two weeks.

Knowing we were several weeks behind other countries, we wondered where we actually were in the epidemic curve. The case numbers were officially zero here, but we knew they would come. Where were we in the process? Would tomorrow be the start of our exponential spread, or were we there already and unable to see it because of the lag? And we knew, when we were discussing how to respond, that if we acted too slowly, we would be on the same path as

Italy.

Then there was the US. When the first case was announced there, Siouxsie Wiles wrote a piece saying that was the country that scared her the most. She explained how what we were going to see there was what would happen when a transmissible disease hit a country without socialised healthcare.

The New Zealand response wasn't my decision, but I hoped we would do the right thing and not end up like Italy. We had the advantage of time.

It became very clear the United States and Europe had a problem, which meant there were probably lots of other places in the same situation, so the science advice quickly became to essentially close the border and shut the country down. That is what the data said we should do.

Work around the risk levels was critical. We needed a way to communicate them calmly but at pace. All the way along we knew we would have to go up through the levels, but perhaps not that we would have to do it so fast.

Information kept coming faster and faster. Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield and Ian Town and I were adjusting our advice sometimes twice a day as we got new information. But the main point became clear – that the only sensible course was to lock down sooner rather than later.

Everything moved quickly, including our decision to shut down travel from China. One of the unsung things about our response was shutting that border so quickly. There was consternation over that at the time, especially from universities with students due to arrive in the country. But that decision, which was led by the Prime Minister, was very important to us starting our response and keeping our numbers low.

There would clearly be big implications for business.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

When we got back to work in January as a business, we started writing a plan for dealing with Covid. We had enough knowledge then to realise we needed to plan for it. What would it mean if New Zealand was involved? What about our supplies from around the world? What was the BCP – business continuity plan – we should have? We started working through that. I had a business trip planned

through Hong Kong, Singapore and China. We pulled it, thinking no one will die if we don't do it, but someone might if we do.

And for the hospitality industry, the fallout would turn out to be enormous.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur, Blue Breeze Inn, Chop Chop Noodle House, Go Go Daddy, Woodpecker Hill

In the restaurants we always do a Chinese New Year promotion and I wondered if that would actually be in bad taste this year. We went ahead with it, but during those couple of weeks our concerns just got more and more serious. I started to think about contact in the restaurants. We have big and small restaurants, but they are all bustling, close-knit places. By February I had begun to realise we might have to limit the number of people in the restaurants and to wonder how we could still make them they feel comfortable.

For the first weeks, gathering information was the most vital part of the response.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

A week after Waitangi, I invited Rodney Jones to Wellington to brief me. He arrived with a bio-statistician he had employed and another economist. This was my first introduction to something called the R value of the virus, which is its transmission rate. I got a technical explanation about this. They described the R value of Covid-19 as being exponentially higher than that of other viruses. They ran me through that and also what was happening in China with shutdowns and so on.

But this was a new virus and reliable information was hard to come by.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

At the beginning we definitely didn't know anything. It was a brand-new disease. But the scientific community internationally was amazing at sharing information for this crisis, and we soon learnt a couple of key things: that the fatality rate was not as high as that of SARS and that the virus was really catching. Those two things were red flags because they made it less likely it would be controlled.

The virus was related to the common cold and SARS, but it was different. For instance, it affects old people but not the very young, unlike a lot of respiratory diseases, which do affect the very young, and it has a very different pattern of disease progression, so can incubate for a long time. Some people got mild symptoms; others were badly affected. There appeared to be a pattern where people seemed to get better then suddenly declined. All those things were new, and people were trying to get advice on things that weren't yet understood. But the coronavirus crisis became really serious in the middle of January when it became clear that it had established itself outside China. By then, an increasing amount of my time was being spent focused on the disease and scanning the international information to see which places were coping. Taiwan was leading in conquering the disease. Plans in the West were not working out.

For too long, it seemed, there were many more questions than answers. And even the answers weren't that reliable.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

The information supply in these cases is always frustrating. I still have questions. It's also difficult because countries are in the midst of an outbreak. They are trying to deal with the virus, save lives and stop transmission as well as collate information and share it. It's tricky because there are questions that you can't answer till there is much more data. There were hints of answers, but not quite enough information.

As scientists and medics, we get a lot of our information by reading the reports and papers that other scientists and medics put out. Mostly they have been through peer review, but that takes time. With the outbreak, we've seen wider use of pre-prints – versions of papers that may not even have been sent to a journal for peer review yet. They are just made available online for everyone to read, which is a great thing and a terrible thing, because we have had some truly appalling pieces of work coming out and some absolutely amazing ones. The

best information we ended up having come through a joint WHO-China report at the end of the outbreak in China, looking back and saying: this is what we have learnt. We are dependent on people being transparent about their data and I think the Chinese were pretty good about that.

There were still large numbers of people who thought this wasn't something to worry about.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

I started to get wind of a few things. My husband Scottie's business had a lot to do with China and we were starting to hear a lot about things happening there. That was on one side. On the other side, like a lot of Kiwis who live in London and read nzherald.co.nz regularly, there seemed to be an amazing over-reaction. It felt like a beat-up, particularly compared to the UK response. It wasn't even on the front page of the *Guardian*.

Gradually the non-scientific community started to take the virus seriously.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

In the back of my mind, my colleague's reports could have been just local gossip, but as the virus gained momentum it appeared the reports were accurate. The rest of the world watched as China built a hospital in 10 days. It was obviously serious, but we still thought it would be very much a local problem. That thought changed as we watched it spread to Italy and Spain.

One of my first intuitions was that there could be a long-term economic effect – especially as our company has Chinese clients. We noticed a lot of our clients couldn't get their goods out of China and were facing out-of-stock situations and no visibility on when new stock would arrive. Many were tweaking their budgets and plans accordingly. Maybe we should tighten up on our team too. Normally at the start of a year there is a spate of resignations as the youngsters plan their OE, but that hadn't happened, so we started a round of

redundancies.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

I really thought it would end up being another bird flu or SARS, but during the next few weeks it started taking more of a drastic tone with what was happening in Wuhan. I started to really take notice when someone I knew on the ground in China, whose opinion I respect, started saying it was bigger than we had been told. But the people around me here still weren't that interested in it, even as January turned into February and more and more stories started to come out.

One reason I think people didn't pay much attention was that China is so big. It seems like things are always popping up here and there. They don't talk about them and generally seem to control them. But because I knew a bit about how the 1918 flu had worked, my interest started growing quickly when this virus began jumping around on smaller levels to other countries. But in hindsight, the main impression looking back is how quickly it all happened.

It soon became clear the impact would be about more than shifting seats around in restaurants.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

We were getting nervous noises out of the forestry industry. And we are, as a country, very reliant on China for our exports and our services economy generally. It was obvious this was going to cause a significant economic hit and we began to do work on that. Some exporters were saying they were not really having any trouble getting stuff in there, but forestry was telling us China wouldn't take their logs. The picture was very clear. During one of those very early conversations, I said: 'If it gets out of China, it could be serious.' There was an impression that it would stop at the Chinese border. It's interesting to think back on that now.

Priorities and work plans were hastily rejigged.

Juliet Gerrard

Everything changed for my year. I used to have a schedule where I flew around a lot, giving talks and consulting with people. There were a lot of international meetings, many of them in Australia. One by one everything disappeared and got rearranged. I live in Auckland but wasn't spending much time there. I was spending a lot more time in Wellington and my days were getting longer and longer. I have a day job at the University of Auckland where I am professor of biochemistry. I am seconded from that, but I still had post-graduate students to look after. I also have a team to support me in the advisory role. They are a good crew. Slowly, as everything became completely Covid, I became very reliant on them to keep other aspects of my role going.

Slowly but surely, the ripples began to spread.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

After first hearing of the virus, my antennae were raised again three days later. Because my union covers aviation workers, including flight attendants, I had an introductory meeting with Greg Foran, the incoming CEO of Air New Zealand. There was no real agenda – it was just an introductory meeting – but he happened to comment on how he had just got this big job and one of the first things he had to do was close down the Shanghai route, because of this virus in China. Major global airlines that like to be in front of the game were starting to route everything through Singapore. That's a major operation. You can't just ring Changi and say 'We're on our way.' So that told me it was serious and made me think I had better keep an eye on this too.

A couple of weeks later, I was travelling through Christchurch airport and, though most people are quite used to seeing Chinese travellers wearing face masks, for the first time I noticed a non-Chinese person with a mask on, walking really anxiously through the transit area. That really stood out. Even though we had been hearing about this virus and it was far away, here was someone who looked afraid and was trying to stay away from people. Many people probably thought she was over-reacting. I thought, 'Wow! It is coming.'

Anyone travelling overseas couldn't fail to see the impact the virus was already having.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

My business partner, Rebekah Hay, and I had talked about work-related stuff just before I left for Vietnam. We thought it was going to be like SARS and Ebola – a worry about something that wouldn't happen. But the fact that I was flying near where it was happening had her worried, and she wanted me to take masks and hand sanitiser and be prepared to possibly go into quarantine for weeks. So off I went with my daughter to enjoy our holiday. It was only when we got off the plane in Hong Kong and were surrounded by people in masks and found the same thing when we got to Hanoi, that we realised the intensity of the problem in that area.

The public was soon focused on the implications.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

As time went on, it got bigger and bigger and started to take over our talkback content. When we did our very first talkback on it, at the end of January, it took over almost the whole of that show. People seemed quite concerned, but there were others who had lived through bird flu and Ebola and SARS saying we shouldn't take it too seriously. David Clark, the Minister of Health, was saying wash your hands and practise safe coughing.

And the unforeseen consequences started to appear.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

One thing that was directly relevant to us was that my son Campbell was due to go on a school trip to the United States in April. He was diagnosed in January with Crohn's disease, so we have become very aware of anything viral because it's an auto-immune disease and he was travelling overseas. We were at a birthday get-together towards the end of February and it was quite strong in our thinking then. We

thought Campbell's trip might get cancelled, but the mother of another kid was completely taken aback by the idea. It hadn't even crossed her mind that such a thing was possible.

CHAPTER 2

One month to lockdown

**27 FEBRUARY–18
MARCH**

Total cases to date: 0

Total active cases: 0

Total deaths: 0

28 February

New Zealand reports its first case of Covid-19 – a person in their sixties who had travelled from Iran. The government places restrictions on travelling to New Zealand from Iran.

29 February

Health staff begin meeting direct flights from Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Thailand.

Panic buying begins of toilet paper, flour and other items. Increased demand for face masks and hand sanitisers leads to shortages nationwide in supermarkets and pharmacies.

1 March

An Utting Research poll finds that 47 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the government's overall response to the Covid-19 outbreak.

The New Zealand government announces that anyone who has visited northern Italy and South Korea must self-isolate for 14 days.

4 March

An Auckland woman in her thirties who has visited northern Italy is confirmed as being the second case of Covid-19 in New Zealand.

5 March

A third case of Covid-19 is confirmed in Auckland in a man in

his forties whose family recently travelled from Iran. This is the first known person-to-person transmission in New Zealand.

9 March

First collaboration between scientist Siouxsie Wiles and graphic artist Toby Mills appears on spinoff.co.nz, illustrating the 'flatten the curve' concept.

11 March

The WHO declares an official pandemic.

13 March

Auckland's Pasifika Festival is cancelled due to concerns about the virus spreading into the Pacific.

The Black Caps play a one-day international against Australia in an empty Sydney Cricket Ground amid concerns about the spread of the virus. The rest of the tour is later called off.

14 March

Ahead of the first anniversary of the Christchurch mosque shootings, a national remembrance service is cancelled.

The government announces anyone entering the country must self-isolate for 14 days, except those arriving from the Pacific. Cruise ships are banned from the country.

An event is held at Auckland's Marist College. It is believed to be the origin of a cluster of cases that will grow to 96 – the second largest in the country.

15 March

Finance Minister Grant Robertson says the government is expecting a serious blow to the economy from the effects of the virus and the travel ban.

16 March

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern says any tourists that enter New Zealand and don't self-quarantine will be deported.

Air New Zealand halts share trading and slashes services, and the Reserve Bank announces an emergency official cash rate cut.

The government has advised that public events or mass gatherings where 500 or more people are together in one place at one time should be cancelled.

17 March

The government announces a \$12.1 billion package, worth 4 per cent of the country's GDP. The package includes a \$500 million boost for health, \$8.7 billion in support for businesses and jobs, and \$2.8 billion for income support and boosting consumer spending.

A St Patrick's Day event is held at Matamata's Redoubt Bar and Eatery. It is believed to be the origin of a Covid cluster that grows to 77 cases.

Immigration New Zealand places two foreign tourists into forced quarantine for defying government requirements to self-quarantine for two weeks. The tourists were ordered to leave New Zealand following their quarantine.

18 March

With 28 Covid cases in New Zealand, Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield says all cases are linked to overseas travel, meaning the coronavirus has not yet been transmitted in the community.

All indoor gatherings of more than 100 people are to be cancelled.

For the first time in history, the government closes the country's borders to all but New Zealand citizens and permanent residents.

* * *

March was the month the terrible reality of Covid-19 sank in for most people. With the first case of the coronavirus discovered in their own country, New Zealanders could no longer tell themselves that this was just a problem that was happening elsewhere. With some of the country's most iconic and best-loved events, such as the Pasifika Festival, put on hold, and limits put on travel, it was clear that the situation being faced was – to use a word that would be called into service many times over the next few months – unprecedented. There was still a dearth of solid, reliable information on Covid-19. All that most people knew was that it was highly contagious and potentially fatal, and that personal hygiene was important, and they shouldn't hug each other in social situations.

In some businesses, the best laid plans of the past few weeks

were no match for human nature.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

It was about 6.30 on Friday night. I was sitting on the deck with a couple of friends having a beer and, after the news regarding New Zealand's first Covid-19 diagnosis, the phone started to go off with stores ringing, saying: 'We are being attacked. There are hundreds of customers streaming in, buying everything they can.'

The first diagnosis had been announced. Within an hour, for the rest of the night and from then on, we had this demand overload behaviour in our stores.

What had happened was that when people's families overseas – in countries that had been living with the virus – heard there was a case here in New Zealand, they got in touch with their relatives and warned them to be prepared to be isolated for weeks. That is what drove the panic buying, especially of toilet paper, hand sanitiser, canned goods and non-perishable foods. If you looked around social media, you could see it unfolding.

That led to what felt like several weeks of manic demand overload. In our previous operating model, we could pump people through, but this was incredible. We were putting two to three times the normal volume through the supply chain and our stores trying to meet demand. We found ourselves overnight in crisis management mode.

In other offices, the reality of the virus turned out to be much closer to home.

Sido Kitchin

Magazine editor

It had been business as usual when I got back to work after the holidays. I usually stayed glued to my desk, but early in March I went to a *Bachelorette* reunion filming. It was an embargoed event, so there wasn't a lot of discussion about it afterwards.

About a week later, I got a call from TVNZ to say one of the guys from the show was being tested for Covid-19. They were sending home any of their people who had been in contact with him.

This was probably the first time that anyone on my radar had come up like this. We had just done a photo shoot with the guy, so I had to send home people in the office who had been in contact with him. And then we quickly had a staff meeting about it because once

you put the words ‘*Bachelorette*’, ‘boy’, ‘coronavirus’ and ‘TVNZ’ together, there was no way the news would stay out of the headlines for long.

His test came back negative in a couple of days, but in that short time there had been a lot of anxiety around the office.

After that, day by day, hour by hour, everything changed dramatically. Our company got us to set people up to work from home. Nobody was being told they had to work from home at this stage, but we wanted to be ready if we needed to.

The TVNZ scare made it clear just how close the risk of contact could be.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

One of our colleagues was on the flight that turned out to have brought the first case into the country from Iran, via Bali. It was the day after he landed that the first case was identified. We realised he had been on that flight and had come into the office for about an hour on the way home from the airport. We got him to go into 14 days of self-isolation and we sterilised and sanitised every surface we could in the office. And we insisted he get tested, but it felt like a long time before he was able to do so. In the meantime, our colleague with family in Wuhan was in tears and inconsolable. I realised from her reaction, knowing what she did, that this was a lot worse than the flu.

We had another colleague whose son had compromised health. She was very upset too. These connections to the virus were all too close for comfort and the risk factors for people were high. I implored everyone to keep things in perspective, but seeing the reactions made us as a management team quickly take some steps to put their minds at rest.

We started our own form of social distancing, and we split the team in two to increase the space between people. Fortunately, we had made a major investment in tech in the past few years, so everyone was portable and fully connected, and those who wanted to work from home were able to with no difficulty.

I had a friend visiting from Australia for a few days. She was in the country when the PM warned that visitors would need to self-isolate. She immediately tried to get on the next flight back so she could miss the obligatory period.

I was there when she rang Qantas to change her booking. She was

told that they were experiencing delays and her call would be answered in five hours. She eventually got through and got home, thank goodness, but I think she was disappointed that her airline gold card didn't make a difference to the time she spent on hold!

Everyday life was beginning to change rapidly, sometimes in subtle ways.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

We had a couple of good friends to dinner, and when they arrived, I went to give one the customary hug and she pulled back, insisting on physical distancing. I thought, 'Shit, she was right.' I was planning union work around this and telling people what they should do, and here I was giving someone a sloppy old hug.

Another thing I saw and thought was significant was that well into March I was still commuting around Auckland on crowded trains – it was standing room only on the 7.10am from Avondale to Britomart. But about a week later on the same train people were really cautious about physical distance and keeping away from each other.

For the government, the tough decisions were just beginning.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

From the point of view of government, a critical moment was the decision to close the borders to anyone not a New Zealander. It was not a decision taken lightly, but there was no doubt it was the right thing to do. When the time came, everyone in the room backed it. The biggest thing was to do with Australia and that relationship we have. We really do move really freely. Should we have exempted them? We had to do something different for the Pacific, because for many places New Zealand was the only way people could get in and out, but we shut that down quickly as well.

Any interruption to international tourism was going to have a

widespread impact.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

It was a gloriously fine Queenstown day and I was cleaning my swimming pool when the CEO of our district health board rang to tell me we had the first coronavirus case in our district. Two hours later, I heard the Prime Minister announce the closure of our borders. That was my OMG moment. The district was in trouble and I would not be having a day off for a very long time.

This region has for years been the darling of New Zealand. People have fought tooth and nail to move here. They have set up businesses and produced more than our fair share of New Zealand's economic value. And it's been built on a combination of the beauty of the place, the stories it can tell and the entrepreneurship of people who have come. It's had seven per cent annual population growth and massively increasing GDP. But without tourists to drive our economy, the challenge facing Queenstown was going to be enormous.

Businesses big and small faced challenges that differed in size but not in kind.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

My business partner and I were on our first ever road trip through the South Island, having left at the beginning of March to visit existing customers and try to drum up new business for our ginger syrups and fizz. I should have realised something was up when one of our customers told us before we left Wellington not to be surprised if people started saying that they wouldn't be buying anything new with Covid looming. As Rebekah and I headed further south, socially distanced elbow bumping was replacing shaking hands, and by the time we hit Queenstown and Wānaka people were more than happy to see us because tourism had already dropped so much they had nothing but time on their hands.

Parents in particular were worried, but there were extra worries for some as schools struggled to keep up.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

Our son Campbell's school trip to the US was still on as far as we knew. On 4 March, parents got a letter acknowledging the virus was out there and asking whether anyone wanted to cancel or postpone. There was 100 per cent support for the trip from 30 parents. It was a little more complicated for us because Crohn's disease is controlled by drug treatment. If he got the virus, he would have to stop taking the drugs, which wouldn't be good for him. About a week after that we got an email saying the school was keeping a close eye on the situation. And the next day we were told the trip was being postponed.

Funeral directors expected a pandemic to put a huge strain on their businesses.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

We cleared out our chapel to make room to line up caskets, like we had seen in reports from Italy, in case we had hundreds of people to look after. We closed down one branch so we could store bodies there, and we got equipment and chemicals to be able to cope with the onslaught of death which we thought would come.

The whole country was clearly going to suffer a massive economic blow, and union representatives were particularly concerned.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

Early in March, coronavirus was the number one item on our senior leadership team agenda. One of the reasons it was on our radar is that we are a union with a lot of members in aviation. The next meeting we had after that was with Air New Zealand senior management, and it was clear their business had gone off a cliff. It was a real shock. We didn't know any numbers then, but it was an international aviation phenomenon, so it was obviously something we had to work through for our members. One was that the airline had new senior

management who were an unknown quantity, so we didn't know what sort of strategy they would drive. There was concern for the safety of our members doing their jobs, as well as for employment and income security. And the government hadn't announced its support package then, so we didn't know what sort of political backing there would be at any level.

Some institutions, such as the University of Auckland's Bioluminescent Superbugs Lab quickly put pandemic plans in place.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

Early on, I put together a plan for my lab. It seemed obvious the virus was going to arrive in New Zealand, so I wanted to prepare us for it. I drew up a pandemic preparedness plan and put it online for anyone anywhere who wanted to use it. Many people later told me they were glad to have access to that. People with bosses who were not taking the virus seriously showed my plan to them and they adapted it to suit their own needs.

A key part of my approach at the lab was that if things took a turn for the worse, we might have to stop our work straight away. Everyone was advised to put things in place so they could do that. They were quite resistant: 'But I have to do this.' 'I need to finish this.' 'I can't just leave this.' But I told them no one could start any new experiments and they all had to be able to put their work away at a moment's notice. If people were given 24 hours to prepare, they never would. There would always be just one last thing they needed to do. I wanted them to get prepared before they needed to be, so they would act calmly and do what was necessary if the time came.

Determined individuals insisted that life would go on as normal – or as normally as possible.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

My thinking was coloured by the fact I had been working in the media back during the SARS crisis. That didn't affect us – in fact, it turned

out to be quite abstract – so even at the beginning of the year, this virus seemed quite abstract.

I was being self-centred, thinking about my wedding to my partner, Annabelle Watson, on 7 March. It never occurred to us to reschedule it. We did have a few thoughts about our honeymoon in the States. I was being quite laissez faire, but Annabelle, who is more forward thinking, rang the doctor and was told there was nothing to worry about. In fact, he was going to the US the next day himself. We were advised to take the usual precautions and not make it into a big deal.

I did go to the pharmacist, who had dollar signs in his eyeballs when he found out what I was there for. I stocked up on everything I could think of, including a hand sanitiser which smelt totally toxic.

Between then and the wedding, we found out another friend had been to the same medical centre as us and been told by a different doctor there that they should definitely not go to the US.

The wedding was a classic big do with all sorts of people mixing and mingling freely, and I'm very glad it didn't turn into a Covid-19 cluster.

In the middle of all the conflicting advice we decided to go on our honeymoon. By the time we actually left, the day after the wedding, the US media were full of hair-raising stories. Every morning, we sat up in our posh hotel with our goose-down pillows, watching them get more and more shrill.

Parts of Los Angeles were beginning to shut down. Some things I had booked were cancelled before we arrived, others we managed to get to the day before they were shut down. It changed dramatically in the short space of time we were there.

We drove to Palm Springs and found a completely different atmosphere. People were talking about the virus but not doing anything about it. When I noticed men in the loos not even washing their hands, I wondered exactly what the point of even worrying was. But when we got home again, there was plenty to worry about.

For one expatriate, scepticism about Covid-19 was about to be shaken in the rudest possible way.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

I hadn't been taking it that seriously when all of a sudden there was a series of events being cancelled, and things I did in London on an

everyday basis were being shut down. Over about a week, just one thing after another was no longer happening.

My first reaction to a Twitter prediction pushing for a lockdown was: 'You have got to be joking.' If we shut everything down, all these businesses would disappear. That was actually a horrific viewpoint. The UK death toll was rising, already in the hundreds, and Italy and Spain were taking off.

I still believed the stories that I was being fed – it was just a flu; the data showed my age group would not be affected.

I was watching all this going on around me when the big one hit: a lead client sent an email saying they were postponing a project we were working on because of the virus. I called home and said I couldn't see the point in sitting in an expensive Airbnb with all these costs and doing Zoom meetings that I could be doing just as well in New Zealand.

I packed my five large suitcases, advised my landlord I was leaving, changed my ticket and left the next day. Twenty-four hours after the client postponed the project, I was on my way home.

I didn't dream I would ever get the coronavirus then. In fact, I most likely already had it and didn't know.

I had had dinner with a friend two nights earlier and we joked about it being the last event in London because everything else had been canned. She got sick too, and when we looked at it later we realised it was around the same time. We hypothesised that we might have got it at the same event, or perhaps one of us brought it to the event. But that was the only contact I knew I had had with the virus.

I sulked all the way onto the plane, right through the flight and off again. The crew said they weren't allowed to wear masks or do anything that acknowledged the virus even existed.

I wore a mask all the way home. I was a vigilant hand washer. I did fly business class, so I had more space, but the planes were pretty empty anyway. That probably helped a lot of people not get sick. I became this vigilant person, wiping down anything I touched.

Although I didn't know – or even suspect – I had the virus, I decided on the way back to self-isolate when I got home. I had been based in London for most of the year, away from my husband, Scottie, and self-isolation wasn't mandatory at that point, but he has bad lungs and I didn't want to take the risk of passing it on if I turned out to be infected.

I had been working insane hours. I was tired, wired and rundown. We have a little shack in the Coromandel and sitting on the beach sounded like a good idea, so I planned to go there.

I got to Auckland at about 4.30am. Scottie met me at the airport but didn't come near me. I hadn't seen him in three months, so that

was pretty hard. He had the 4WD and everything I might need, with the exception of supermarket food. But that wasn't a problem as there were no isolation rules and, as far as I was concerned, I wasn't sick. We chatted from afar and I drove to Whitianga.

I walked into the New World there wearing gloves, glasses, hat, hoodie, full sleeves and no skin showing. I did a fast shop and refused to let anyone pack my groceries for me.

Our place is very isolated, with no one for kilometres around. I was as jet lagged as hell and couldn't sleep. I started to feel a bit gross. I hadn't eaten in days. Anxiety set in. I hadn't felt that for a while, but it was coming on thick and fast. Like a lot of people, I get a cough with anxiety. I felt very on my own.

I rang Healthline and basically got told I was anxious and had jet lag. I hadn't been in contact with someone from Italy or Wuhan who was known to be infected.

But I woke up the next day with a full sore throat and a worse cough. I hadn't eaten in days. I tried few more phone calls for input about what to do. I did an Insta post about realising that it is very scary when things you rely on in the first world are taken away. I had no access to a GP and no information that seemed of any use from Healthline. I was starting to get completely panicked and didn't know what to do next.

Self-isolation was increasingly becoming the norm for returning travellers.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

After we got back from Palm Springs, we went into self-isolation. We thought that when we got back the authorities would be interested that we had been away and give us information about self-isolation and whether we should take our daughters out of school or even have them with us. There were extra forms to fill in, but no one could answer our questions about the kids.

From landing to standing outside the terminal took 45 minutes. We had imagined there would be orifice swabbing and God knows what, in what was supposed to be a very dangerous time. But there was nothing.

It turned out self-isolation for us was compulsory and in the case of the kids it was recommended but not compulsory. There didn't seem much point having half and half. They were at school when we

arrived back, so went straight into isolation with us when they got home.

Having had the wedding and the honeymoon, we figured we would be pushing our luck if we didn't follow the rules. We were hearing about weddings and other big events being cancelled, and realised we were the lucky ones.

So, there we were, the only ones in our street self-isolating (before it became fashionable). The next week everyone was doing it.

We felt like a freak show. Our lovely neighbours came to look at us but also to bring us parcels, leaving them on the front doorstep then standing back. There was no question of us going out to stockpile toilet paper or anything else. We couldn't go shopping, so we had to rely on neighbours for our grocery supplies as well. That was great, even though we felt very conspicuous, there turned out to be a real community of people around us who would help us.

Some people sensed what was coming and started to prepare for a life working from home, which could be a mixed blessing.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

Interview requests to talk about Covid-19 were becoming more and more common. Near the start of the university term, I began to rearrange my schedule so I could work from home several days a week. There was a lot of research-based stuff I needed to do that I could do from home. Fortunately, my lab was fantastic about that and let me get on with it. But it was hard knowing they were all there and I would have liked to be in there too supporting them.

Within a week of being home, there were so many people asking Covid-19 questions it was clear I'd have to put my own research on hold. It became a full-time job keeping up with what was coming out about the virus.

The pace of information being released was so fast and the amount was so vast, you couldn't hope to keep on top of it all. In the early stages, I was involved in making sure the people who needed information for decision making got it. The Prime Minister's chief science advisor pulled bunches of people together to collate information and try to summarise it for the government.

My body went into something like fight mode. I was waking up at 5am every day, no matter how tired I was. I was not sleeping for long and my brain was racing the whole time.

The sort of information Wiles and experts in other fields were collecting was crucial to decision-making at government level.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

The framework of the pandemic plan we had was good. It particularly focused on the capacity of the health system: how many ICU [intensive care unit] beds we had, how many we would need, PPE [personal protective equipment] and how to deal with that. It was created for the possibility of an influenza pandemic, and this was different, but as a base document it was very good.

I did think these were some of the biggest decisions a finance minister would ever make. It was a burden, but it was important to be able to do to them in real time and take a no-regrets approach.

There was a debate, but it happened very quickly. The original \$12 billion package of financial support that we announced on 17 March we essentially prepared over four or five days. A yearly budget where we might do \$3 billion of new spending is agonised over for months.

We identified early on that we wanted people to stay attached to their jobs, and the way to do that was to create a scheme that got money out quickly in a lump sum for 12 weeks. We thought that would give people time to adjust and plan.

We were hoping we would not be in restrictions for that long.

Naturally, we debated what kinds of rules and constraints we would put in, and settled on the fact that as long as we had an ex-post audit function it was better to take the risk that some people who didn't need money might get it, rather than to go late and see people lose their jobs.

I got an estimate from Treasury, who told me that on the weekend we prepared the first package between \$8 and 12 billion would go out. I said: 'Goodness, surely not.'

Around the same time, we also moved relatively quickly to create a second decision point in government. Cabinet is the standard decision point, meeting once a week to make big decisions. That wouldn't work in this case, so we created a Covid Ministers Group with power to act as Cabinet. So, now there were two points where decisions could be made.

At first, that was meeting once a week. By the time we got into the heart of the crisis, it was meeting every day. That enabled us to move very, very decisively. The wage subsidy scheme was changed four times in its first two weeks, and we could do that with this structure.

There were certainly some very surreal moments. One occurred at the end of the week we announced the \$12 billion package. I came into the Beehive Theatre on the Friday morning to say that there was a \$900 million convertible loan being given to Air New Zealand. I announced it, took questions and walked out. As I was passing, one journo pointed out to me that under any other circumstances there would have been massive headlines about the government stepping in to save Air New Zealand. That day, it was business as usual.

The wage subsidy proved to be a crucial lifeline for many businesses.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

We applied for the subsidy. I don't know too many restaurateurs that had big savings accounts in case a pandemic rolled around. We did it a few days later than a lot of people, so it didn't come through for a while. We worried: will the money run out before we get any? There was a massive element of: will we have to do redundancies now? You felt the responsibility for all your staff down to kitchen hands and foreigners on three-month working visas. How would they pay rent and eat? The pressure of all that was pretty high.

But the subsidy did come through and took a bit of pressure off that side of things. It's been such a massive reality check for a lot of people on how life can turn very quickly. When we don't have an adversary for quite a while, people forget life can change fast. There are some good points to having that element of fear put into you. It makes you more appreciative about when times are good.

As much as the government's moves made a difference, there were other measures being taken by many businesses as they went into pandemic survival mode.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

The relief subsidy helped us. It would have been very difficult without that. We would certainly have had to make more people redundant than we did. Everyone understood there needed to be change. We

reduced hours to match the suddenly reduced workload, cutting them back to 32 a week. And we kept working, putting together new business presentations for when we came out of this.

We began to think about what the world might be like. For instance, if we are only going to play locally and our borders stay closed and our world becomes smaller, it's the time to become really creative. We were proposing things like aligning BMW with self-drive holiday experiences around New Zealand – they loved it, even though they weren't in a position to sell any cars. Unfortunately, few clients were in a position to do anything as we got into March.

And the appetite for information about the event would prove to be enormous. Fortunately, the country was well served by its explainers.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

My collaboration with Toby Morris began early in March, starting with me sending a message to the Spinoff asking for a graphic to accompany my next piece of writing. They put me in touch with Toby and I sent him the 'flattening the curve' graph and said it was missing the idea of how our actions flattened the curve. He was scribbling things down as we chatted and what he produced was pretty much exactly what I had seen in my mind's eye. We gelled immediately. I have worked with artists before, so that helps, and doing years of science communication means I've learnt how to talk to people who aren't scientists.

For advice, people turned to their accountants, who themselves had a lot of adjusting to do.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

A year ago, we had shifted out of our old office and had three months effectively working from home before our new office was ready, so we were well set up for that. By the middle of March, when people were being encouraged to work from home, we did some more tech prep.

We had had vague conversations with some clients in the lead-up,

but as soon as the wage subsidy was announced calls came flooding in. I had a lot of clients who were exceptionally grateful for the wage subsidy. It had saved their businesses.

There was also a concentration of calls around negotiating with landlords. A clause had been added to many commercial leases after the Christchurch earthquakes to the effect that if you can't access premises you can drop your rent by a fair amount. This was popular with people wanting to cull any costs that could be culled. But some people had landlords who had taken that clause out.

We were not really prepared for the government to go to the high-trust model which they did with the wage subsidy among other measures. It is most unusual for any government anywhere not to try to tie everything down in red tape but to open the floodgates. They effectively said: 'If you want some money, here it is. Come and get it and we will tidy things up down the track.'

The form used to apply for the money was incredibly straightforward – just a three-link dropdown box where you put in your details. And for a while, every time I went back to the site it seemed to have been made even simpler and easier to use. The speed of delivery and the level of payout were most unusual.

There were other worries for those with family and friends overseas.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

Before I had got out of London, I had been taking more and more interest in the studies about Covid, and I prepared my teenage daughter, who was in Paris on a gap year, to make sure she did some reading too. I hadn't considered at that point that we might have to come home.

Once I decided to leave, I called her and said, 'I'm calling to let you know I'm going home and I'm going to recommend to the rest of the family that you come home too.' She was horrified.

I talked about it with another friend and client in Paris. She said they were going to work from home and invited our daughter to stay with her in their country house in Le Mans. I had been there, and it seemed like a reasonable compromise, so we sent her off to the country. Not without some concern.

Parents were a particular concern for their children half a world away.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

My parents are still in the UK, where I come from. It stressed me out watching Boris Johnson's press conference where he said they would try to protect the vulnerable, but he also said every family should expect to lose loved ones before their time. My mum is very vulnerable. I thought, 'Shit, that's my mum he's talking about.' And I did a back-of-the-envelope calculation and realised that it could be half a million people, including Mum. And I had a day where I broke down and couldn't speak to any journalists.

CHAPTER 3

One week to lockdown

19–26 MARCH

Total cases to date: 28

Total active cases: 28

Total deaths: 0

Total tests conducted: 4210

20 March

Auckland Council closes pools, libraries, galleries and other community facilities for 14 days.

21 March

In a statement to the nation, the Prime Minister outlines a four-level alert system and announces that the country is at Alert Level 2.

A wedding reception for 65 people is held at a Bluff restaurant. It leads eventually to 98 cases of Covid-19 – the country's largest cluster.

22 March

Associate Health and Whānau Ora Minister Peeni Henare announces \$56.4 million in funding to aid Māori communities and businesses to help deal with the pandemic.

23 March

The Prime Minister announces the country has moved to Alert Level 3, effective immediately. People are instructed to stay at home. Schools and other educational facilities will be closed from 24 March. All non-essential businesses will close. In 48 hours, the country will move to Alert Level 4, meaning everyone, with very few exceptions, must stay home.

The number of cases in New Zealand passes 100.

24 March

Former MP Hone Harawira announces that iwi, together with local authorities, will set up roadblocks to prevent people from outside the area entering the Far North.

Roadblocks are also set up by iwi on the North Island's East Cape.

The finance minister announces that the government is negotiating with banks to ensure that nobody will lose their home if they default on mortgage payments.

The Olympic Games are postponed to 2021.

25 March

A state of emergency is declared, as the country prepares to go into lockdown at midnight, for a minimum of four weeks. New Zealanders receive an alert to their phones from Civil Defence reading:

From 11.59 tonight, the whole of New Zealand moves to Covid-19 Alert Level 4.

This message is for all of New Zealand. We are depending on you.

Follow the rules and STAY HOME. Act as if you have Covid-19. This will save lives.

Remember:

- *Where you stay tonight is where YOU MUST stay from now on.*

- *You must only be in physical contact with those you are living with.*

It is likely level 4 measures will stay in place for a number of weeks.

Let's all do our bit to unite against Covid-19.

Kia Kaha.

The Warehouse Group prematurely announces that it is an 'essential service' without consulting the government. It is made to close its stores.

An Epidemic Response Committee to scrutinise the government's response to Covid-19 is set up, chaired by Leader of the Opposition, Simon Bridges.

Stats NZ confirm that the population reached 5 million sometime in March.

* * *

With no deaths and only 28 cases, the government took action to prevent an exponential increase. A four-level alert system was announced on Saturday 21 March. The country was

immediately put at level two. At the highest level, four, with a few exceptions for essential workers and services, people were required to stay in their home ‘bubbles’, in contact only with those people they were with at the time of lockdown. With just five days to prepare, the country would go to Alert Level 4 on 26 March.

The alert level system was a clear way to communicate the urgency of a dire situation without leading to panic.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

The Prime Minister was very passionate about using the alert levels as a way of getting the message across. She had to decide which alert level to go to as they were being announced. Looking around the world, you could see where the response was going wrong. If you don't do it well, people don't comply and then you have chaos, which is the worst thing that can happen in terms of containing the spread of the disease. But the PM has a gift for understanding how to take people with her, and by putting us at level two when she announced the system, she gained huge social licence to announce a move to level four two days later. The strategy helped people stay calm.

It was a Saturday afternoon, when many people were not taking in any news media, but the message soon spread quickly.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

I was driving to Les Mills to go the gym and heard it on the car radio. When we do something like that on Newstalk, with breaking news and so on, it's always quite dramatic. I remember thinking it was, to use the word everyone uses, unprecedented, and thinking it was a moment in history. But I still carried on and went to my yoga class, which as it turned out was the last one I would attend for a long time.

Their jolly South Island selling trip took an urgent turn for the

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

The night the announcement of alert levels was made I booked places for Rebekah and myself and the van on the ferry back north. By the day the move to level four was announced we were leaving Kaikōura for Picton. We could feel the intensity of the whole thing flooding in. We headed off in good time but encountered a head-on on the road, which held us up for 45 minutes. We got to Picton with an increased sense of panic. By the time we got in line there were just two vehicles and only 25 minutes until sailing time. One of the crew got on the RT and looked at us hopelessly. We thought, 'We're not going to sail.' But finally, she waved us on. We were essentially one of the last two vehicles that got on the ferry before they pulled the plug.

Alert levels made little difference to people already suffering with Covid-19.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

I had to go to hospital and be properly assessed. I drove myself there to be confronted by more hazmat-suited people.

I was taken into a room where I spent three days and nights with no one around me. They were doing best practice, which meant as little time with me as possible, but they were friendly and kind. I definitely felt my anxiety reduced a bit because I knew I was in the right place. My blood oxygen levels were fine. I was getting enough air.

They released me and I went back to the campervan at our house. I was an outlier in terms of how long this was going on for – by this stage I was at least three weeks infected. Public Health called every single day to check on me and my family too.

The family went into isolation of its own accord before the lockdown. We pulled the kids out of school even before I was diagnosed. After I had been symptom-free for 48 hours, Public Health said I could go back into the house but should stay separate as much as I could.

On the following Wednesday, I had a bad headache. On Thursday, it had become a migraine. On Friday, my daughter came back home – she had been tested and was negative and she looked a bit peaky, then

a bit hot. Then a cough started, and my test was still coming back positive. Maddie also got tested and came back negative again, but because of her symptoms she got treated as a probable.

We remained isolated and no one else got infected. Maybe she didn't have it. Maybe she just had similar symptoms, or maybe it was another strain.

But I got it all back again and had another few weeks of being sick before I finally got a negative test. It's crazy how much of an outlier I was with a total of six weeks to get a negative result.

There was – and still is – no data saying I will have immunity. If anything, my immune system could have taken a real hit. As soon as they would let me, I planned to have a flu jab. I was already a supplement queen, so there was a lot of vitamin C going in.

I never intended being a poster child for Covid. I didn't think one Instagram post would get me on the front page of the *New Zealand Herald* with a breaking news ticker, but they picked up my story from social media. I feel like people took it seriously from me, so I felt the interviews I did helped people feel either less scared or more cautious – both, usually.

With lockdown looming, a new style of government emerged. Among other initiatives, people from a range of government agencies were brought together into one group to expedite advice and implementation.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

We tried to apply firm principles from the start – to go hard and go early – but also to be flexible, admit when we needed to shift gear and change, and not dwell on whether something was a mistake or not. It was a significant shift in the way governments make decisions.

This was a very different way of dealing with things. A big chunk of it was the strong and decisive leadership from the PM, but there were also many others involved. There were big contributions from agencies across government and individuals, such as Dr Ashley Bloomfield. The organisation of government swiftly moved to an all-of-government group.

International education came up pretty quickly as an issue after tourism. There were disputes with the universities, although not all of them. Some had worked out quite early how things would be. Also, different universities were differently exposed to the financial fallout.

Some had a much higher percentage of Chinese students. Then hospitality and retail came forward as exposed sectors.

One thing we identified early was a framework for how to think about it from an economic perspective. We tried to create space to be thinking more long, medium and short term. We have forced ourselves to stop and think.

There would be three waves of response. The first wave was to fight the virus and cushion the blow. The second one was positioning and kick-starting recovery. What would recovery look like? What did we need to do? And the third phase was called reset or regenerate. They are really waves not phases. They lap over and under each other. It's not that we finish one and then have the next one.

Some businesses tried to accommodate their clients' coming woes with a co-operative approach to getting thorough the crisis. Others took a pre-emptive hard line.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

My mother does accounts for various companies and forwarded me a letter from one person to their clients, which effectively said: 'We know times are tough but we won't be doing any work for you until we are paid in full.'

We decided to significantly cut our monthly fees for three months. I knew the effect that four weeks of no business would have on people. I didn't know specifics, but I knew everyone's income would be well down and that monthly costs add up in a big hurry. Our income was also well down in April and we qualified so I took the wage subsidy for our practice and decided to pass on some of the benefits of that to clients so they could work their way through the lockdown.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

There were some amazing moments. Noel Leeming ran a one-day sale on chest freezers. Two days later, our stores were hammered for frozen food. People bought the freezers and went out and filled them up. For 24 hours you couldn't buy a frozen chicken or peas at the supermarket.

We worked hard to prevent panic buying and stockpiling. I went on TV to put the message out there. We used the hashtag

‘#shopnormal’, and I think everyone heard it and thought, ‘That’s a good idea for someone else.’ It didn’t change enough people’s behaviour.

We soon realised we couldn’t manage this like a regular crisis, say, an earthquake or flood, so we switched to a different mode. Every morning at nine, I chaired a teleconference with 350 store owners. I gave them a situation update and explained the new rules that we would have to work with, then spent 30 or 40 minutes answering their questions.

We also set up a dedicated Covid-19 site on our company intranet and had daily email updates with the latest news and changes going out to all our team members. Our support centre was working at a furious pace creating processes and guidelines to deal with the new ways of operating. People needed to know the new rules about so many things: serving coffee, operating a deli, bakery or butchery, how to keep customers safely two metres apart.

I had had some recent practice working remotely. A couple of years earlier, I had broken my leg quite badly in a mountain-biking accident and had four weeks working from home. A few things had been put in place then that meant it ran pretty smoothly this time. We were very lucky and our couple of years of investment in core tech worked well.

I soon learnt that part of my routine had to be managing a transition from work to not working. When you work from home, it is easy to just shift your work from the study to the living room and in front of the TV in the evening. I had to mentally mark the transition and remove myself from work. Otherwise I wouldn’t do a good job. I never used to have a gin at home before, but now it became a regular thing.

It was going to be business – or social service – as usual for the Auckland City Mission, whose programmes helped many people without homes in which they could be locked down.

Chris Farrelly

CEO Auckland City Mission

The Mission works with large numbers of people. We open every day with breakfast for 150 and have lunch for the same number, all in a closed space. We cook on site. We have a number of facilities for homeless people, including the largest emergency housing unit in Auckland. And we recently opened another for homeless women. And

we have a detox unit. We had to work out how to make all of those safe under lockdown.

A big thing from day one was the decision that the Mission would operate fully right through the crisis, no matter what. We were not going to take away what would be an essential service for the most desperate in the community. In fact, it would be needed now more than ever.

We never thought, 'What will we not do?' We thought, 'How will we do what we do safely and in an even more effective way?'

We were founded in 1920, right after the 1918 flu epidemic, so began working in a situation of disarray and high need. This is in our DNA. We have been through the Depression and wars, and we have had a relative period of quiet until just now.

When the alert levels were announced, we were fortunate to already have a pandemic plan in place. We immediately dug down and made sure every part of it worked and knew what we would do at all levels.

There were concerns, especially over our staff and their physical ability to do the job and keep safe. One model showed up to 50 per cent of us would come down with the virus. We took that seriously. We did a count and created a whole system that would allow us to operate well even with a lot of people down. That took some planning, but we were ready for whatever came our way.

From the announcement of levels to the lockdown was just five days, and businesses had to think quickly not to be caught out.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

As we were heading back to Auckland, we remembered we had probably the largest production of the year scheduled – all the syrups we were producing for winter sales. People were still saying they could get them made for us, but as we realised the extent of the closure, we knew it would be nonsensical to have vast amounts of stock sitting around. We cancelled that run. We were lucky that our products have a long shelf life. We had enough of everything in the warehouse to keep going under what was obviously going to be considerably reduced turnover and with no idea how long that was going to last.

At magazine publisher Bauer Media, the order to work from home had been issued before the announcement of alert levels and preparations were well advanced.

Sido Kitchin

Magazine editor

Suddenly, it wasn't just about testing our equipment for working from home. We were actually going to do it. By the time we went to level four, everyone had done at least one day remotely. It didn't come naturally to me. I had been guilty of not following orders in the past, having sneaked into the office back in October when we were locked out while the SkyCity Convention Centre fire was burning a hundred metres away. But there were no deadline heroics from me this time – it was a government directive.

I was trying to make sure everyone else was out and no one was staying until the bitter end. People were reluctant to leave. I felt a bit bad at how untidy the office was when I left it on the Tuesday. I grabbed my laptop and a few folders and walked out of the building wondering how long it would be until we got back.

The next day, working from home was still a bit clunky – stressful, but exciting, especially when we sent the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* to the printers that night. We moved straight on to getting *Woman's Day* out.

It's fortunate the *Day* team knew how to work under pressure, because we changed that issue a lot that week. Our research team had asked 700 women what they wanted from their magazine at this time, and they gave me a great steer on content. We put together 24 pages on how to survive and thrive during the pandemic: an isolation survival guide with features on home schooling, keeping the kids entertained, staying connected, working from home, coping with self-isolation, binge watching suggestions and healthy pantry recipes.

We had an incredible sense of purpose because we knew our readers needed us more than ever. There were half a million of them, many elderly, many on their own, many apprehensive about what was going on.

It was an incredibly emotional and stressful time. My team included a mum worried about her daughter in another town, a solo mum far away from her whānau, a pregnant staff member who was very anxious. It wasn't like you could easily call everyone together to provide comfort and reassurance. Instant messaging via Slack was practical for work but also nice for keeping people's spirits up.

Working from home was a key theme of lockdown. Especially when it was complemented – or complicated - by the novel experience of working in the same space as children who were not going to school.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

As far as going into lockdown went, it was fine for us and the children in practical terms. But we hadn't quite grasped the reality of what it means when you are a parent and there are two of you working from home.

Annabelle and I have very different styles of work – I work in a comms role, which is often about being called on the phone and having very animated conversations. But Annabelle does legal work and it's two screens and track-change documents that are just blood red. She needs to have quiet and focus. We invested in noise-cancelling headphones for her very early on. But I could still hear everything and was working amidst the general dross of 'What's the password for Minecraft?' and 'Find your father and ask him' and the FaceTime chats you can't block out.

We were trying to be productive employees, but there were technical issues for both of us. And when something went wrong, we couldn't just get Geeks on Wheels around to fix it. There was a lot of time wasted on the phone over those. Ordinary problems were somewhat exacerbated by the stressful times. There was some stress in the house. It was a 12-day-old marriage and we were thrown the biggest test known to humankind – shut up together and unable to escape.

Restaurants, by their very nature, would not be able to keep going in any form under lockdown. There would be no working from home for them.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

We had done all the pre-alert level safety procedures and retraining and shifting tables, and then it only lasted a couple of weeks before we found out we would have to close completely.

Social activity around the restaurant scene was still pretty high level right up to the last minute. We closed for good on the Saturday that the levels announcement was made. By then it was almost getting

out of control. I was working in Parnell at Woodpecker Hill. I thought we would have two people that night, but at one stage the restaurant was full. It felt like the *Titanic* and the band playing on. But the fact the party was happening also encouraged you to persevere. Whether it was resilience or denial, who knows?

I came away from that last dinner having had quite an enjoyable night, despite the fear that was looming. I knew that in other countries the rest of the world was telling a different story.

But there was no time to dwell. I had to move on to the practicalities of locking things down. I was planning for the worst. In my head I was thinking: 'OMG, there will be marauders.' And we couldn't have security on site because of social distancing.

I put away anything that could possibly be a target for a break-in. We went through all the perishables and boxed them up and gave them to staff. I took all the alcohol off the shelves and locked it away. Then I got a big chain and put it on the front door. My mind was running pretty wild thinking about what could happen. I thought this must be how people felt when an enemy army was approaching. Of course, it turned out to be the polar opposite, thank God. But I always plan for a bad scenario. I'm that type of person.

Schools were among the hardest hit sectors, with concerns about the effect it would have, not just on children's disrupted education but on their general wellbeing.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

I only became really concerned the week before we went into lockdown. The local and national kōrero started to intensify. This was the first time I had been messaged from the Ministry of Education talking about school closures. My natural instinct told me that if they were talking about it, then it would only be a matter of time before it happened, and the following week we were in lockdown.

It almost seemed like an overnight transition from our 'perceived' normal into the next phase of our reality. We had always had an open-door policy at our kura. Now we had suddenly started locking our door and turning people outside of our immediate kura whānau away, in order to keep those in our care safe and well. This process acts against our tikanga and who we are as Māori.

Although my initial thoughts were with my immediate whānau, my initial actions were completely absorbed by my professional and

moral responsibility to our kura. We had to make fast decisions to maintain the health of all students and their whānau. We closed our doors two days prior to the government-directed message.

We had prepared our whānau for the closure, but seeing our beautiful students going toward the buses on that final day was heart-wrenching. I had never witnessed anything like this in my 30-plus years of teaching. There was a sombre feeling in the air. Some of our students were happy, some were sad, some were crying, and some were dumbfounded. It was a surreal day. I shed tears that day, tears that our tamariki were living this, in their short timespan on earth, tears for the thought of what was to come, not only in the immediate future, but also in the distant future.

But it would take more than a pandemic to stop the Auckland real estate industry while there was still the chance of a sale.

Vicki Wallace

Real estate salesperson, Remuera

We managed to have our last weekend of open homes the weekend before lockdown was announced. We had 30 groups through that home. We had hand sanitiser, a notice outside saying what to do if you'd been overseas. We were religious about taking all the precautions. Then, with the lockdown coming officially, the vendor panicked. Fortunately, on the Monday we got a pre-auction offer. The lockdown began Thursday, and we brought the auction forward to Wednesday. Instead of having the bidders in our office, we had five people on the phone doing telephone bidding and got a great result.

For the volunteer sector, represented by the Student Volunteer Army that arose out of the Canterbury earthquakes, lockdown represented a chance to help in a whole new way.

Sam Johnson

Student Volunteer Army

There was a key moment for me on the day lockdown was announced. I went to a café in central Christchurch to buy muffins and slices for the office team, and it was closing up. I told the owner I had had this idea for doing food delivery for older people, who would be struggling

in lockdown. It could be done as an online service as people couldn't leave their homes. The café owner said he thought Gilmours, which is owned by Foodstuffs, would be able to supply us. Fortunately, I knew the CEO Chris Quin from when we had been Sir Peter Blake Leadership Award winners together, so I contacted Foodstuffs and they said you can just do it out of New World. That was great because there are obviously a lot more New World stores than Gilmours.

But there was no online New World service in the South Island, so we built one for them. We partnered with a couple of entrepreneurs who helped us define our strategy and build a shopping system.

But bubbles inevitably meant people were separated from loved ones. Deborah Pead's mother has Alzheimer's disease and was in a care facility.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

Not being able to see my mum has been painful. Like many people in care, she had been in severe lockdown since about two weeks before the official lockdown. The management could not risk the elderly getting ill, as they were particularly vulnerable. I gave up on Skype with Mum a while ago because she kept looking around trying to see where I was, and it just confused her. Even the phone calls with her were not easy.

‘When are you coming to see me?’ she always wanted to know.

‘I can't because of the virus.’

‘What virus?’

‘I explained the day before yesterday. I'm worried about you getting it.’

‘Did you give it to me? Am I supposed to give it to someone? No one told me about the virus.’

She gets very indignant and it's very hard on both of us.

While a life-threatening pandemic increased its spread around the globe, new life continued to make its way into the world.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

My first concern was for my daughter, who was due to give birth and who had a birthing plan. However, that was in threat of changing due to the level four status we were going into. I was also under a lot of pressure to complete our house, which we were and are still building in Koutu. We had purchased a piece of whenua, 52 acres, this is now our papa kāinga for my tamariki and mokopuna and future mokopuna.

There were tradesmen completing the building, finishing the plumbing and hooking up the house to our solar panels – we are completely off the grid. I was trying to put the pressure on these workmen to finish the project so my whānau would have a place to isolate, so they worked up until the first day of isolation, to hook up one toilet, a basin and to connect our outside shower. At least, when the day finally arrived to welcome the newest member of our whānau, we knew everything was ready for the baby.

Children were reportedly at low risk from the virus, but at high risk of being made anxious by the crisis. Though not all of them realised that.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury

Primary school teacher

I do relieving teaching, going from school to school. As soon as cases started rising, it crossed my mind how much of a risk I might be. I am in contact with an incredible number of people every day. I could be in a different school every day of the week. I worked on the last day before lockdown at a school I'd never been in before. Only half the class had turned up, so it was only about a dozen kids. The announcement was made just after lunch had finished and we had already gone back into class. I got a note saying: 'Schools are closed from tomorrow, make sure kids take their stuff home.' So, I had to tell kids I'd never met this big news that we were closing down and they wouldn't see their regular teacher until who knew when. They didn't care at all.

Some people found they had left things to the last minute. One was nearly in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Bill Newson

With everything happening, I didn't realise that the place you were at midnight was the place you had to stay. I was working in Auckland right up to the end. Kerry, my wife, was at our house in Ōrere and I knew I could work from there. I thought I would work in the city and in weekends drive out and see her. I was in a meeting from 5 to 7.30 on Thursday and a woman who was there explained the situation to me, so I had to throw everything in the car and head out late as fast as I could.

Last minute panic buying was still a threat, even for those closest to the problem.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

Work had been sorted out the week before, with the warehouse and distribution centre already organised [for lockdown]. I didn't get time to think about it at home.

My wife, Sue, said, 'Should I stock up?'

I told her, 'I know a guy, who you also know and are married to, who's been on TV saying, "Don't do that." So, don't do that.'

There was a complication as well because she was a 'vulnerable' person. She had two weeks in hospital last year with pneumonia, so we had a chat. I said, 'This is serious, and we will do it right. If you go shopping, you are not leaving the house without gloves, masks and so on.'

Bubble life could be a mixed blessing for people with mental health issues.

Sam Hardy

Mental health advocate

My obsession is the fear of being contaminated by something I don't like. For me, it's my own or someone else's urine or faeces, and the compulsion is to decontaminate myself or prevent it in the first place by washing myself and sanitising possessions. The biggest distress is the thought of not being in control and having uncertainty.

The coronavirus triggered that in a big way. I was not in control of

what sanitising products I could get. There was no way to know when it would end, so no control there.

In order to be able to go to work at my job and not use the toilet there, I don't drink from late at night till the middle of the next day, which means I also live with dehydration. I get a bit dizzy and have some issues thinking about things. I have a thing called geographical tongue – it's like bald spots on my tongue, probably because of how dry my mouth gets. To me it is normal and manageable, but I haven't lived for a long time in a world where I'm drinking as much as people recommend, so it is hard to know how different that is from being fully hydrated.

I tried not to stock up at the last minute, but I wanted to. I'd be no better than anyone else if I did. Mum sent me a couple of bottles of sanitiser, just in case. I bought about a month's worth of commercial antibacterial hand soap from a commercial supplier. At the supermarket I was very careful not to take stuff everyone else needed.

Me and my girlfriend didn't do anything out of the ordinary. We tried to follow government guidelines. We went out before it began and bought some non-perishables, but we didn't stock up on anything much. We got frozen pizzas, soup, bread. The Prime Minister had said we could still go to the supermarket.

On the day of lockdown, it was business as usual for those at the heart of the crisis.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

The Prime Minister and I had agreed I would stay in her bubble, which meant my partner effectively could only be with me. We have children and grandchildren to take into account. I didn't leave Parliament until reasonably late that night. My partner had put himself into lockdown a couple of days earlier because he decided it would be worth it. When I went home that night and commented on the situation, he shrugged his shoulders and said, 'Get used to it.'

As the minutes ticked by to level four, most New Zealanders were sound asleep in their bubbles, but for others work went on, especially if that work involved contact with people overseas.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

By the time we got to lockdown I was ready and relieved. And I was still awake. In fact, I was on a phone call to other chief science advisors around the world, discussing the crisis, at the moment it happened, and I got to say: 'New Zealand has just gone into lockdown.'

11.59pm
Wednesday 25 March
LOCKDOWN

Building a bubble

Alert Level 4 required New Zealanders – with a few exceptions, such as those engaged in essential services or supermarket shopping trips – to stay in the place they were in, from when the lockdown began until it ended. They were also to have physical contact only with those they were living with. They had four days' notice of the move from Alert Level 2.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

Ōrere Point, Auckland: We had a few issues figuring out the bubble because my wife, Kerry, wanted to be able to help support the grandkids in Auckland. We at first thought you could have two bubbles that interacted but soon realised it wasn't going to work. I'm not in any sense a hoarder but I'm a better-be-prepared joker. That had paid off in the Wellington earthquake with my emergency backpack. Kerry gave me a hard time about being obsessed with getting in extra supplies. There was no objection to me stocking up on the wine, and I didn't plan to buy up all the flour, but we had a few debates. It didn't make any difference because by the time I got to the supermarket, you could only see where the flour had been.

Chris Farrelly

CEO Auckland City Mission

Mt Eden, Auckland: The City Mission was classified as an essential service, but the plan originally was for me to work from home anyway. I'm getting towards 70 and if this thing became huge, I could easily have been very vulnerable. But it soon became clear that staying at home wouldn't work for me. It became obvious that I needed to be on-site. Our real home is in Northland, and my wife and I share a house in Auckland with two other people and that was intended to be our bubble. The decision that I would go into work changed things so we decided my wife, Sue, would spend lockdown

up north and I would stay in a part of the house separate from the other couple, although we had socially distanced meals together.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

I went into our bubble with my wife, Sue, in St Heliers in Auckland. There are just the two of us. And one cat. Our son was in Coatesville in a bubble with some other people from his company. Our daughter was at university in Otago. We wanted her to come back to Auckland, but she just folded her arms and said she was holding out in her flat with her friends.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

Paparoa, Northland: The week before the announcement I saw things accelerating. I said that's it, I'm getting my things together. I took up a bag with enough work for several weeks. My husband, Carl, and I always had a plan that if there was ever an emergency of any sort all roads lead to our farm, Danbri, and everyone should just get back here because there is room for everyone.

Our son, Daniel, and his fiancée, Bella, and our daughter, Britney, and her fiancé, James, love it and see it as their home. Daniel, being an ex-officer in the Territorials, had things planned and had barrels buried with emergency supplies for when the balloon went up. We had a deep freeze full of home-kill and jars of preserves. And produce growing. More than anything else, we had space.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

Central Auckland: I had to choose whether to make my bubble in Wellington or Auckland. I had been spending all my time in Wellington, closer to where things were happening, and my first thought was that that would be best. But then Ian Town, the Ministry of Health's Chief Science Advisor, decided to stay there. He was more useful physically present in the Ministry meetings, and increasingly my work would be done remotely anyway, so I thought I would be better placed in Auckland and moved back. It also meant I was away from the more frantic operational stuff and more

able to think ahead. I was still working very long hours. My partner lives in a separate house and he ended up in a bubble with his ex, and his kids went backwards and forwards between their two houses. In my apartment, it was just me.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

Long Bay, Auckland: We are a lucky nuclear family with no custody issues, so there were no discussions about shared care. This whole lockdown made me feel incredibly lucky and blessed. We moved to Long Bay two years ago and built a house designed for our needs. We made sure the kids' bedrooms were big enough, and have a couple of living areas. We had space to be together or apart. That made it really easy.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

Titirangi, Auckland: People think that being a restaurateur I have a houseful of food, but it's not like that, so the first thing I did when I heard the news was buy a deep freeze. I filled it up with what I thought I would need for a month or six weeks of lockdown, which took a long time. I also made sure there was a good stash of wine.

Four days before lockdown there was some bogus information going around that the government was dropping us into level four the next day. That freaked me out and led to a lot of flying around because I wasn't fully prepared. I had seen what happened in Turkey when they got four hours' notice and there was panic in the streets. We had had time here to learn from the rest of the world. It showed me that a good lead-in time to prepare for this was the key to keeping the people calm. We still had the toilet roll hoarders, but that will always happen.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

Grey Lynn, Auckland: My daughter and her boyfriend had been living at my apartment. We were initially talking about whether they could stay here as a bubble, but it's a small apartment. Rose had the attitude of people her age, saying even if she got the virus it would be short term and she would be fine. I wasn't so sure, having come back from three

weeks on the road where I had come in contact with a huge number of people and could be a time bomb, so we decided we couldn't share space. I kicked Rose and her boyfriend out and had a bubble of my own. My business partner, Rebekah, was in it and came and went because it's our office. Also, we had been in that van together all that time. And I didn't rush out to stock up on anything. I think I briefly luxuriated because I'd been travelling for weeks, put my feet up and put the tele on.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury

Primary school teacher

Palmerston North: We ended up with eight in our bubble. My partner and I had been living with my cousin and her family – them, their three kids, their eldest son's partner and us. Max and I have been building a tiny house on their driveway. We were in the finishing stages of it when we went into lockdown.

Siouxie Wiles

Microbiologist

Ponsonby, Auckland: We had an uncomplicated bubble. There were three of us – myself, husband and daughter – with a houseful of books and board games. We all had bicycles for exercise. We ate well because we were in the privileged position of still having jobs. My husband is a lecturer, and working from home was easier for him because he is a mathematician. He could still do his research because his is not a lab-based science. I can't think of any people I'd rather be with, and the house is big enough for us all to have our own space. We have been working together well as a unit and it has made me appreciate what we have. It also made me mindful that there were lots of families for whom being confined to a bubble would be adding stress upon stress.

Vicki Wallace

Real estate salesperson

Remuera, Auckland: My husband, Gary, and I still live in the family home where we raised our three sons. They had moved on so there was plenty of room. One son was living not far away with his partner, but they didn't have a lot of space so moved here to be part of our bubble. That was fine. They were both working from home but their routines were

organised, and it worked out well.

CHAPTER 4

Lockdown. Alert Level 4: week one

26 MARCH–1 APRIL

Total cases to date: 262

Total active cases: 256

Total deaths: 0

Total tests conducted: 15,499

26 March

Streets are empty as New Zealand enters day one of lockdown. Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield warns New Zealand may see thousands of cases.

Finance Minister Grant Robertson announces that the government has paid \$1.5 billion to more than 240,000 workers as part of its Wage Subsidy Scheme.

Former Air NZ boss Rob Fyfe is appointed as a government-business liaison person for Covid-related matters.

29 March

New Zealand reports its first Covid-19 related death – a woman in her seventies from the West Coast.

New Zealand Police launch an online form for people to report Alert Level 4 restriction breaches.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield hold their first joint daily media briefing.

30 March

The Radio Sport network is closed indefinitely.

Police confirm they have arrested three people for persistent breaches of the lockdown rules. They have received 4200 reports of breaches on their online form.

A [stuff.co.nz](https://www.stuff.co.nz) column describing New Zealand as a ‘nation of narks’ is followed by many similarly themed pieces in the

weeks to come.

* * *

When they woke up in their bubbles on Thursday 26 March, the population began to adjust to the new normal of lockdown. From their home offices – or bedrooms as they were formerly known – and via the suddenly popular Zoom calls and other technology, people began to look for solutions to the damage the pandemic was wreaking. Things started to fall apart very quickly.

Concern over the coronavirus and a potentially enormous death toll was the greatest worry, but the economy was not far behind, especially in a town such as Queenstown, whose prosperity had been built on the tourism industry.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

Most parts of New Zealand rely on tourism for a portion of their economic activity, but we rely on it almost 100 per cent. We only have two industries – tourism and construction – and construction is the trailer on the back of the tourism truck. One day, someone turned the key off in the ignition and we were left parked on the side of the road.

So, we had a real culture shock. It blew everyone away. Nothing was happening in the district. We live on a state highway at Lake Hayes, and normally when I went out to get the paper every day there was a constant stream of traffic coming past. Suddenly, it was just an empty road.

It looked like a very large number of the retailers and bars and restaurants would go to the wall.

On top of that, we had all the migrant workers. Tourism has been built for years on those thousands who come here and keep the place going. There are young people on working visas who spend six months in town before moving on. Others from around the world come on migrant visas, hoping enormously they will find a way to become New Zealand citizens. But when redundancies start happening, they are the first people to lose their jobs.

Tourism and aviation go hand in hand, and aviation workers also looked set to take a big hit unless alternative employment could be found.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

Our flight attendants had good interpersonal skills and were well trained to be first responders. They are the people who deal with your heart attack at 11,000 metres. At the same time, with a pandemic, we needed more workers in health care on the ground, so naturally we wondered if there was a way to mix and match. We had a website called Job Match where workers and employers could go to look for alignments.

Our view as a union, for cases like this, is a well stepped-out concept we call ‘just transition’. When these big shocks come – whether it’s coronavirus or tech change or moving away from carbon jobs – we don’t want to see workers thrown on the scrapheap like they were in the economic deregulation of the 1980s. The idea is to slow down and invest in how we transition workers. How do we create new jobs? If they are in the wrong place and don’t have the right skills, what can we do to retrain and relocate them?

So, there are big adjustments to be made in the short and medium term, but we will need skilled staff to rebuild at some stage. In the meantime, we were focused on the government support that had been made available and making sure employers used it properly and workers got the benefits from it.

We had problems with some employers over the wage subsidy. First of all, employers leaving it late to apply and thinking the process would be complicated, which it wasn’t. Some of them just thought it was easier to put workers off and leave them with no income. Sick leave wasn’t an option. It’s nice to say the majority of employers were good, but a pretty sizable minority weren’t, and we had to force some to apply for the subsidy.

It’s incredible that we had to have workers go on strike in a major New Zealand company on the day of lockdown because the employer decided they were an essential industry and had workers working shoulder to shoulder. They weren’t an essential industry. That wasn’t an isolated example.

Lockdown increased the already considerable practical difficulties of providing food and shelter for the homeless, but

help was not far away.

Chris Farrelly

CEO Auckland City Mission

I realised I had made the right call in deciding to come into the building to work. We had 95 staff on the front line, and they were unbelievable. It was important for me to be here among them.

We knew straight away that to maintain social distancing of two metres between people meant we would have to close our dining facility. That was when some of the first magic started. We decided to produce takeaway packages with a meal a day for a homeless person. And not just the completely homeless. There are a lot of people in old boarding houses who have shelter but no cooking facilities.

Auckland City Council said they would make that food for us from their fantastic kitchen in Albert Street. So, from day one, 400 of those meals came over to us and continued to come every day after that.

Between 11am and 1pm people quietly rolled in, picked up their parcels and left. It wasn't a communal dining facility, but we saw them and there were nurses and doctors here to check them and help us ensure everything was done safely.

That was just the beginning. The community response as a whole – from government, council and other people – was incredible. Everybody came in behind us in a way we had never experienced before.

But there was another big area of worry – the hundreds of homeless people who were at risk. The advice we got was that everybody should self-isolate at home safely. But how can you do that without a home. What could we do?

We had to move quickly. Some of our facilities were very crowded. We couldn't keep 50 people in the James Liston Hostel with common showers and bathrooms, even though it had just had a big refurbishment. Meeting social distancing requirements meant we had to get half the people out. Where would we put them? Could we continue to do our detox work?

We had to close our detox unit, finishing with one group and cancelling the next intake. That meant we could house 10 people from James Liston Hostel in the detox unit.

One amazing benefit of this was that the 10 people we put in the detox unit, who were all on alcohol and drugs but hadn't gone there to detox, detoxed after they went in. I went to visit them and met an old guy who told me: 'This is the first week in 28 years I haven't had a drink.' He may never drink again.

That was followed by another piece of magic, which I know happened in other parts of the country, not just in Auckland.

We had all these streeties to care for and some encampments were starting to form. The government came to the party and provided motel units for every single homeless person in New Zealand. Ten of the people we couldn't put in James Liston went to a motel. Within three weeks more than 200 people were put in emergency accommodation.

Most had other issues to deal with too – addiction, mental health and cognitive problems. That made more work for us. Putting them in a motel and enabling them to stay there day to day meant our social work teams had to increase day-to-day monitoring and care, making sure both their food and their meds were right.

And miracles happened. I often had people telling me that 'those people' didn't want to be inside and live in a home, but I saw for myself that once they were somewhere that they felt secure and had a shower and bed, beautiful stories of change were starting to be heard.

When the pandemic started there were expectations of a possible high death toll as it spread, but it turned out there were very different challenges in store for funeral directors.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

As soon as we went to level four there were no gatherings permitted, which meant no tangihanga. We could pick a body up and that was it. No viewing. No nothing. Families' grief at being separated from their tūpāpaku was terrible. Those first five days were just heartbreaking. We had never seen anything like it. And we were drained by being the ones who had to convey the message from the government to families, which meant we got flak for being so insensitive.

Then some new guidelines came through that made it easier. You were allowed viewings from the same bubble as the deceased. It eased things when we were able to connect people in that way again. I still got up with a bit of anxiety every day because at the viewings we still had to make sure people were keeping their distance.

I also saw a side of me I didn't like, because I had to be the policeman, ensuring everyone kept their distance. People would pull up when they knew their loved one was in our building and just wait around outside, lingering in the carpark because they wanted to be close. As the numbers grew, I told them they had to leave, and no one liked that. As days went by, I grew a bit kinder. But I still told them that I would have to call the police if they didn't go.

We had a plan in place for how to deal with the body of someone who had died from Covid. Initially the hospital would inform us, then the family could tell us their wishes. They could have it directly buried or cremated without any viewing. If they did want a viewing, we had a procedure for embalming the body safely and treating it like we would someone who had died of hepatitis or HIV. We didn't know when to expect our first Covid victim, but we were prepared.

My wife, Kaiora, was flat out because we had some of our admin staff stood down. They had children with respiratory conditions, so they couldn't really leave their bubble. Kaiora was doing accounts and admin as well as being a funeral director.

I missed our staff, but the children have to be looked after. It wasn't easy on us financially and I was grateful for government funding to help pay staff who were at home. Our profit margin dropped, but it wasn't a time for profits, it was a time for humanity.

The rules did change a lot in lockdown. They were quite grey in the first week and it was confusing for everyone. The guidelines that had been issued for level two stated you couldn't have more than 100 people at a gathering outside or 50 inside. We encouraged people to embalm their loved ones so that we could keep them safe until level two when they could have a proper tangi – but we didn't know when that would be.

Fortunately, we had just finished setting up our own mortuary to do our own embalming. It was a bit complicated opening it in lockdown. Our builders worked up till the last minute and council approval came the day before lockdown. We got an email confirming it was operable and it was confirmed on 26 March.

Then we just needed our embalmer. There were complications around that because he had to come from out of town in lockdown. I had to do a letter saying he needed to travel for essential services, so he came up the following week to start full-time.

This made things easier because bodies could be embalmed straightaway and we had more control of everything.

Kaiora Tipene

Funeral director

The guidelines for funeral directors were hard to follow. First, they said that within 24 to 48 hours you must bury or cremate the deceased at the nearest cemetery here in Tāmaki Makaurau, whether the person was from here or not. That goes against all Māori custom and tradition, which requires someone to be returned to their place of birth when they die.

It was also an added financial pressure. People might not have the money for a burial plot or even a cremation. But that amount of

money would easily cover the cost of driving Mum home to be buried where she belongs.

I struggled with this at first. It challenged me. Where in the guidelines could I find some form of dignified send-off for our families? I couldn't find any at the time.

In the first few days we had funerals that were my husband and me singing 'Whaakaria Mai' and a hīmene by ourselves for deceased loved ones, who had every right to have their families with them. This went against everything we are about.

I said to Francis, 'There are so many things in the rules about what whānau can't do. What room do we have to practise some tikanga?'

We made a submission on the third lockdown day, giving examples of how we could still manage to have a funeral. At the time, they didn't allow families to come to the funeral home. One member only could come to do the paperwork, but they preferred it done by phone or online.

We said if they could come and do the paperwork, what was to stop them from seeing their loved ones? We would enforce sanitising before every viewing – we already wiped caskets down, wiped chairs down, wiped everything down. We had sanitisers everywhere.

We asked the ministry: if we have these guidelines and practices in place, what's wrong in us managing a viewing? They allowed that under Alert Level 4, but only people from the same bubble as the deceased could view the body.

Media were an essential service, but many companies moved their staff off site to work from home. For those who kept going to the office, moving through deserted streets in the shadow of the virus, it could be an unsettling experience.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

The lead-up to lockdown had been an anxious time for me and it was worse when we went into lockdown. I was absorbing so much media myself it made me slightly panicked. Sometimes my show's host, Kerre McIvor, would have to talk me down as well as dealing with her callers' worries.

I couldn't believe we were still going into work while everyone else in the organisation was at home. What if we died? Kerre said the chances of that were very small, but when it's part of your job to listen to every expert and professional you start to fret a bit.

To be fair, working from home might have been possible, but it would have been incredibly difficult because you do have to have someone pushing buttons to get a show to air and answering the phones.

I'd ballpark that our floor normally had 200 people on it and when we went into lockdown that number went down to eight. It was a bit eerie at first, but we got used to it. We didn't all have our own desks anyway and were still hot desking. It takes a good 15 minutes to clean everything at the start of a shift. We disinfected everything we touched, and we all had our own mike socks, so we were not talking up close with everyone else's germs.

There are big companies on the other floors of our building but they were all deserted too. And we couldn't use the lifts because, apparently, there are more germs in them than there are in stairwells.

We also had to make big adjustments for how we communicated with our colleagues. Some of them were at home, some were at another company building out at Ellerslie, and a few were in the newsroom but not many. It made handling breaking news – which there seemed to be a lot of – and even organising an interview 10 times harder.

Normally a big media office is crazy when there's a big story on, and it is all very exciting, but there was no one there to be crazy.

Our pre-show meetings with the boss were very different. Normally he would say 'Are you ready?' and we would say 'Yes, we are', and off we would trudge. Now it took 10 times longer by the time we all dialled up our Zooms, and someone always had a technical issue.

It was a long time before we started to think about any stories other than Covid. Things that would normally have been a big deal got no attention. For those first weeks, it was wall-to-wall coronavirus and anything else seemed irrelevant.

It was a big deal for us when Radio Sport – the dedicated sports network – was closed without warning on the Monday after lockdown. In fact, it was devastating because we had worked so closely with those people, often sitting next to each other. They had done an amazing job of managing to find something to put to air when there was almost no sport being played anywhere in the world, but with no sport in the foreseeable future, it wasn't enough to keep them broadcasting.

My job was safe because it felt, especially in those first days, like we were being counsellors to the people of New Zealand. There were days in the first week when all we did was answer questions about what they were and weren't allowed to do.

I gave in and ended up counselling people off-air because you can't

put everyone who calls through to Kerre.

'I'm just wondering, should I go into lockdown in my house or my girlfriend's?'

'How much do you like her? Do you want to be there for a month, or do you think the relationship won't sustain that?'

'I don't know. I think I should probably stay in my own house.'

'There's your answer, then.'

Or, 'My local park is 45 seconds up the road. Can I drive there for exercise, because I couldn't walk that far?'

'Yes, that would be fine.'

Or, 'My post box is in the country and it's a two-kilometre drive. Can I use the car to get my mail?'

'Yes, that's fine.'

There were lots of shared-bubble queries but the one that stood out was from a guy who was a parent in a chain of six or seven families who shared care of various children between them. It was sad, but I advised him to leave the kids with their mother for lockdown rather than risk contact with so many people.

Lots of people were looking for workarounds to make life easier in lockdown, and I often felt it was people who should know better wanting to see what they could get away with.

I wasn't qualified to give any advice, but people do see ZB as an oracle of information so that's my job.

Outside, the centre of Auckland was even more bizarre than in our building. Usually there would be noise from Les Mills Fitness Centre across the road, but that was silent. The blocks around us are full of cafés but they were all shut. It made you quite pensive. I found myself stopped at the lights on my way home one day thinking: 'I wonder what everyone who would normally be at the Empire tavern having a cheap steak and beer is doing.'

With so much commercial activity suspended, it was anything but business as usual for small businesses.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

Immediately when we went into lockdown, 80 per cent or thereabouts of our customers, most of whom were small cafés and bars, were forced to close their doors. We knew something was going to happen, but it was only when we saw the details of the alert levels spelt out that we realised what it would mean.

Commentators were saying a quarter of the hospo people wouldn't reopen. I had no idea whether that was right. It was impossible to know one way or the other. But I knew their margins were already tight. We immediately offered free delivery anywhere in New Zealand, which prompted a few small orders.

And virtually from day one of lockdown, they stopped paying us. When we sent out our end-of-month statements that week, Rebekah put in a note saying we understood that things were tough and to pay only what – and if – they could. Unsurprisingly, a lot of our debtors had no choice but to suspend payment until they reopened.

With so few places to shop, shopping naturally became a focus of attention.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

I live alone and I was the only person in my bubble. My closest relatives are my brother and his family in Pukekohe. I didn't prepare in any way shape or form for lockdown. Later, I wished I had panic bought, but I listened to the PM saying we could shop normally. The supermarket where I always shop didn't have any flour that first week. No cleaning products. No disinfectant. No wipes. I managed to get some toilet paper. I really wished I had bought flour when everyone else was panic buying.

Supermarket stampedes had slowed down, but there were still issues to deal with – magazine issues in particular.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

The ruling in the first week of lockdown that we couldn't sell magazines was a bit of a surprise. You could see the principle that was being applied – they are items that people pick up, thumb through and put back. So, there was a logic to it, but it felt like, on the range of issues that create issues, it was a pretty niche one. It was the same with shutting down our Lotto counters – we weren't entirely sure about the logic of that when we thought it through. Can I have contactless payment? Yes. Can I print the ticket, stand back and let the

customer take it? Yes, I can. I felt that if you set out with the aspiration of working out how to do it safely then you could have found a way.

But at the start of Alert Level 4, having mastered the art of remote editing, the outlook had been good for magazine editors and their readers.

Sido Kitchin

Magazine editor

On the third day of lockdown we sent *Woman's Day* to the printer. I was on a huge high because we had produced two fantastic mags remotely. I sent an email to the team just before 4pm saying thank you and it was time to knock off.

My husband, Conrad, poured me a stiff drink and I jumped in the pool. Then I got a call from one of the team saying they'd heard a rumour that magazines had been classed as non-essential. I really didn't believe it, but when I rang my boss, it was true.

We were already up against it because it was tough not having bookshops and other regular outlets selling us. There had been pressure on to cut external costs and I had made calls to regular contributors, telling them we wouldn't be able to use them during the lockdown.

I had been sure we would get through the crisis until the moment we were deemed non-essential. That meant we couldn't be sold in dairies and supermarkets – even though anyone who supplied a supermarket was supposed to be okay. We couldn't distribute to our subscribers, who mostly got their copies via New Zealand Post, which was still delivering the mail, or along with their newspaper. It just seemed wrong in a crisis. We reached so many women. We were a crucial source of information, as we saw when we put together the special on life in lockdown.

It didn't make big news because it was Friday evening. I was kind of glad that a lot of staff didn't pick up on it and wouldn't spend all weekend feeling sick like I did.

I knew from my boss that the government had asked for feedback and the magazine industry was fighting the non-essential call.

Of course, a lot of staff did hear and got in touch over the weekend. They were very upset. I kept saying it was business as normal until we heard otherwise in the new week. Which we did. It was a terrible blow. We'd lost the fight to print magazines. It was so

strange to think we had made a whole magazine that no one would ever see.

Lockdown meant work actually got a lot easier for some people.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

I hadn't been able to focus on one thing like this since I did my PhD, so it was liberating in one way. Being in a bubble of one also meant I didn't disturb anyone when I was keeping in touch with people overseas – phone calls seemed to happen anytime between 5.30am and 2am.

I live in an apartment near K Road and Ponsonby Road in Auckland, and I like eating out and wandering around locally. Under level four, doing that was a bit like walking around a film set. It was fascinating to be working behind the scenes, making recommendations about what should happen to control the pandemic and then walking downstairs and seeing what city life looked like when it actually happened.

I enjoy all the places I can walk to from home. There's K Road and Ponsonby Road. I can get down to the water in the bay. At level three and four, the pink cycle pathway was deserted too, and I could walk there.

I was used to seeing the homeless people on K Road, but they were brought into even sharper focus when everyone else had gone. A lot were housed quickly but some stayed on the street at the start of lockdown, and I talked to them. They weren't very chatty, but they were glad to be asked how they were. I offered them a pie rather than advice.

And the birds started coming back. I have a little balcony which looks out over the city. When I'm out on it I normally just hear a hum of traffic, but now there were birds at dusk and the sound of insects.

There were different challenges for those with young children.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

Remembering we had a week's head start on most people, we started

to get the hang of lockdown early, but it still wasn't easy. It was evident that for one of our daughters the anxiety was quite close to the surface. She was afraid one of us would catch Covid and die. As a result, we did a whole thing around reducing obvious media, such as not having radios blaring in front of them. That stuff needs context. It's bad enough being exposed to death tolls and seeing pictures of bodies in temporary morgues as an adult, let alone as a young kid.

I could hear Annabelle's turgid meetings and she could overhear mine and we marvelled at each other's different styles of work. Suddenly we were confronted with each other's dull as dull work life. 'Jeez, that's bonkers,' I thought, about all her legal matters. Then I overheard her say to a friend, about my job: 'All he does is talk on the phone all day.' And that is my job.

We also have neighbours who are quite close, but we weren't used to being close around the clock. Sometimes I felt like I was in *Rear Window*. On one side were the millennials who rent and could be heard. I found out they do a lot of cooking. A couple of nights, they just lit up outside and we had a lovely smell of weed that calmed us all down. But I don't think they had the same sort of angst as the rest of us. They hung up their hammock and put fairy lights in their trees, which sort of said it all.

Despite the restrictions, reality had a way of putting pressure on the limits of Alert Level 4.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

The most momentous gift of love was given to our whānau on the first day of lockdown, 26 March 2020 – my second grandchild was born in Pakanae, at his great-grandparents' whare, under the shadow of our maunga, Whiria. Ironically, I had given birth there 16 years prior, to my final child, his aunty. Te Rauāio Mōrehu Te Runga Presland-Sarich was born at 6.02pm.

The moment I most remember during his birth was the final moments before he was welcomed into Te Ao Kikokiko. My daughter was outside in the water. I moved out of that space to grab something that she needed, and in silence the aunties, uncles and his cousin, Mahalia, born three months earlier than Te Rauāio, were gathered together waiting to hear his entry into this world. I remember stopping and thinking, 'How beautiful, this is your pōwhiri into our whānau, you are so wanted and so loved, thank you for choosing us.'

Isolation was not completely adhered to. Te Rauāio had his Riiwhi Presland whānau with him too that day and the days following. This was now his tikanga. We weren't ruled by Covid-19. We were ruled by the love of our taonga and we still are.

We finally got to move on day five of isolation. Our bubble moved over from Pakanae, out of my parents' place, where we had 12 of us in the house, into our own bubble of seven. The house was still incomplete, we didn't have a kitchen, there were many things unfinished, however we were blessed to be on this whenua and thankful that our local tradies worked so hard to complete this build.

Everyone was really accommodating during this time. The rush period was the initial shutdown when whānau were travelling back home to make the isolation deadline. However, they all made it.

We had tangi in our whānau, on our marae. This was really difficult, especially for those who had lost loved ones. The tikanga I had been brought up with was being challenged.

Government directives around the virus were made for the mainstream population, not for Māori in rural settings, such as the rāhui on gathering kaimoana, fishing for the whānau, netting for kai, hunting and so on. These practices have been passed down from our tūpuna. We had the space, we had the resources, this was a way to keep our whānau fed during times of shortage.

Enforced seclusion and inactivity caused some people to ponder a professional and personal reset.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

I looked forward to seeing what creative things came out of people being in their bubbles. People would have had time to stop and think about things and get new perspectives on life. For the past few years, I have been on a bit of a treadmill. It was nice to get off that and have a chance to sit and think about life.

As much as the pandemic was horrible, I am an optimist and took the chance to think about and appreciate what I've got. I began to appreciate that there was a beach at the end of the street where I could take the dogs down to the water and, for the first time, I was talking to neighbours I had never talked to and building a relationship with them. I started using parts of my house I had never used before because I had been too busy. In a horrible time for the world, with all that we were going through, I started to look forward to the future

and new attitudes.

The lockdown both relieved and exacerbated mental health issues.

Sam Hardy

Mental health advocate

What was happening with the pandemic was how I would have loved the world to have been for the past 10 years. Everyone was being stringent about being clean, and that made me feel extremely comfortable. So in that sense it was good, but I was also aware it was bad for me in terms of trying to get comfortable with being exposed to things.

I had actively been working to overcome my disorder and was in therapy with a private psychologist. I was going to be able to keep doing the therapy on Zoom in lockdown. But it is exposure response therapy, where I gradually accustom myself to contact with different things and work on controlling how I react. It's about managing the response rather than trying not to respond at all. But a lot of the exposure was out of my house, so that was difficult at level four.

Some time ago, I figured out a daily routine that meant I could go outside to work for eight hours a day and I had my job. But my days are not like other people's. There are big restrictions to what I can do.

I have to use the bathroom in my own home or Mum's house. Public or work bathrooms are out of the question, so I am very careful about when I will need to go to the toilet. In lockdown none of that mattered. I could drink as much as I wanted and didn't have to be thirsty. But then I got scared that getting accustomed to not going out might make going back to real life difficult.

I had worked 10 years to get to the point where I was able to function normally when it came to going to work. I was scared that lockdown would undo all that. I didn't realise all this until I was actually in lockdown. All my attempts to overcome my disorder were thrown into reverse.

I'm struggling to prepare for going back to being dehydrated and thirsty all day and every day. I'm worried that after weeks of not being exposed to things I don't like, the anxiety when I have to become exposed to things again will be much higher than before.

I got quite distressed when the panic buying started too. I use quite a large number of hygiene products – antibacterial soap, sanitiser, disinfectant – and this was all gone from the supermarkets and might

not be coming back any time soon.

With the actual number of Covid-19 cases low, other medical procedures went ahead, if not quite as normal.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

My doctor's surgery phoned and said that as I was an elderly person – something that always comes as a surprise to me – I qualified for a free flu shot. I went up to the Richmond Road Medical Centre and there was a tall young woman in a complete spacesuit in a tent in their front yard. I said, 'This is completely surreal in a *2001: A Space Odyssey* kind of way.'

She said, 'All we're missing is the music.'

'And some booze would be good, too,' I said. But they weren't offering that. I didn't get flu.

CHAPTER 5

Alert Level 4: week two

2–8 APRIL

Total cases to date: 723

Total active cases: 704

Total deaths: 1

Total tests conducted: 29,785

2 April

New Zealand has its biggest increase in one day, as the Ministry of Health confirms 89 new cases of Covid-19, bringing the total to 797.

The government launches a Business Finance Guarantee Scheme for small and medium-sized businesses, to protect jobs and support the economy.

Bauer Media announces immediate closure of its magazine titles in New Zealand.

3 April

Global cases pass 1 million.

5 April

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern calls a man seen on a video deliberately coughing on people in a supermarket ‘an idiot’.

6 April

The Prime Minister confirms that the Easter Bunny and Tooth Fairy are classified as essential workers who can continue to carry out their duties during lockdown.

7 April

Health Minister David Clark is disciplined for breaching lockdown rules by taking his family to the beach and driving to a mountain bike trail for exercise.

8 April

A poll finds that 88 per cent of New Zealanders trust the government to make the right decisions for dealing with Covid-19, and 84 per cent approve of the government's response.

Travel company Flight Centre announces permanent closure of 58 stores.

The government launches an \$87.7 million distance-learning package including two education television channels, one in English and the other in te reo Māori.

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As the number of Covid-19 cases continued to rise, the country settled into the routine of lockdown, with varying degrees of comfort. The sharp economic impact of bringing the economy to a standstill soon became apparent.

Despite the disappointment of not being allowed to produce magazines at Alert Level 4 employees at the country's largest magazine publisher, Bauer Media, were upbeat.

Sido Kitchin

Magazine editor

The whole staff got an email asking us to be on a Zoom meeting first thing on Thursday morning. There were 32 people in my team and Zoom was still a bit new for some of them, but we managed. I had no idea what the meeting was about.

Never in a million years did I or anyone else expect the whole business – all those magazines – would be shut down right then and there. We were told to stop working immediately. HR would be in touch.

The day went into slow motion. I've never had a shock quite like it. All I wanted to do was weep, but I had to send a message of love and support to my team. I could only share in their heartbreak and thank them. I didn't know what to do for a long time, but slowly began to call staff members one by one. They were so distraught. My own boss called mid-morning. She was very calm, and her words of kindness and gratitude were touching.

I was broken for days. But being forced to be at home with my family of four and our dog at a time like this was good. Our family had never been closer. It helped not having to put on my game face

and go out in the world, but to be able to hunker down and be with the people I cared about the most

My husband, Conrad, was a rock. My daughter, Cleo, showed emotional intelligence beyond her years and kept me grounded, and my son, Darcy, smothered me with love. They'd never known me not to be utterly devoted to work. I had gone back to work a few months after giving birth with each of them.

Bauer Media's demise affected a lot of other industries, including printing, advertising and public relations.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

The news of Bauer being shut down was very unsettling at that stage in the pandemic. It meant it was worse than anyone thought or imagined. To lose all those heritage titles, like *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* and the *Listener*, it felt very unnerving.

I missed them enormously and started buying whatever was left on the newsstands. Even *Lifestyle Block*, which I suddenly found very engaging. I felt so sorry for all of the people whose careers were suddenly stuck in limbo.

Not having magazines was an awful loss for our firm too. From the PR point of view, it meant there were fewer avenues for us to communicate through and a lot less places for our clients to advertise. Even though the post-digital media landscape is very fragmented, we believed there was still a strong place for print.

The landscape narrowed to a handful of national titles like *Mindfood*, *Cuisine* and *Life and Leisure*. Having fewer places to tell your story is not good for society. We are narrowing the options down to state-owned enterprises – which is fine unless someone disastrous owns the state – and mags you don't really value.

The closure sent a chill through other media, including radio.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

Media-wise, the biggest sign for us that things were going downhill was Bauer. That was a real shock and we did it as breaking news. It

definitely had a ‘who’s next?’ feeling. And that was the first big collapse. Hopefully, we would be the last to shut down, but you never knew.

The Covid-19 statistics continued to get worse, but not as badly as feared. The death toll for which many had prepared failed to eventuate.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

It was a bit quieter in terms of deaths than usual for the time of year. Our busy period would normally have been starting. People would have been dying from common things, but it slowed right down with everyone at home in their bubbles. The lockdown was terrible from a business point of view. No one was catching anything. Everyone was staying warm and healthy – though certainly not wealthy – and everyone was surviving. It was obvious that if we ever want to really slow down our death rate all we have to do is lock everyone up.

But the guidelines around tangi meant our staff were busier than ever. Ordinarily, families would take the body home or to a marae but under the rules we had to do everything on our premises.

And people were delaying funerals until they could do them according to tikanga. My chapel, which should normally have been the place where beautiful funeral ceremonies were being held, was being used to store the bodies.

When whānau wanted to visit, we took them into separate rooms where the family could have a one-hour viewing. Then we would stop and swap over for the next one. This was going on from nine in the morning until eight at night. We also had to make sure there was PPE gear for the staff and our families visiting the loved one.

And we increased our own personal hygiene. My wife and I had a routine when we got home every night. We would get butt naked at the door, get our clothes into the wash and go straight to the shower before we even said hello to the children.

They were safe at home all day in their bubble. They were being sent schooling to do at home on their iPads, like every other child in New Zealand, but it was difficult. They had a few minutes with the teacher and then were left on their own to complete their task. Outside the classroom, their attention spans weren’t great.

Kaiora Tipene

As for the rest of our whānau, they stayed well. My mum had started to get a bit ill the week before lockdown. In the second week I thought about what we might need to do. I rang my sister who had made the decision for Mum to stay in her care. I was grateful for that. I said, 'If anything was to happen to Mum, you know she must go to the nearest urupā or crematorium and not all her children would be able to come.'

She sobbed.

I said, 'Hey, listen, we have to think about this.'

'No, I don't want to.'

But anything could have happened to her in lockdown. I have educated my siblings as well as I can and put it on our whānau Facebook page that if there is any time you couldn't be too prepared it is now. It is not a nice way to experience loss. I gave them all the different scenarios and they all got angry at me. I said, 'They're not my rules. They're the government's rules.' Fortunately, my mum got better.

At the opposite end of the country, in Queenstown, the reality of Covid was worse than anyone had feared.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

I was getting phone calls from people who simply didn't have anybody else to call about their problems – everyone from migrant families of Mum, Dad and kids trying to live on \$124 a week, to owners of established businesses that kept people in jobs. I got phoned at seven one morning by the owner of a good-sized tourism business who just wanted to have a chat and looked to me to say something to make him feel better.

I never thought I would be spending my time trying to find a solution for the welfare of 6500 migrants. I never thought I would be trying to find a way to kickstart an industry that was stalled on the side of the road with the engine off. I never thought I would be in charge of a district that had thousands of people unemployed. It looked like Queenstown was going to end up with New Zealand's highest unemployment rate.

The Student Volunteer Army was also trying to help those who had been hit hard by Covid. There were plenty of people wanting to help them deliver food to people who were not able or willing to leave their homes.

Sam Johnson

Student Volunteer Army

I had never worked so hard in my life. Even with a team of more than 60 people there was so much to do. Good news helped me keep going. I noticed people were more willing to help than ever. The usual barriers you come up against with an organisation like ours, where you are all about asking people for help, just weren't there. I could ring anyone and get through.

We obviously needed vehicles and fuel for our deliveries. I rang Hyundai and said, 'Can you give us some cars?' They said, 'Yeah, sure.' Then I rang the head of Z Energy and said, 'Can you give us some fuel?' and they said, 'Yeah, sure.'

Both those companies came on board in the second week of lockdown, when our demand was starting to increase.

I also noticed I was able to get a lot more done because I didn't have to travel to get to meetings.

Demand for Auckland City Mission's services continued to grow, with support coming from some surprising places.

Chris Farrelly

CEO Auckland City Mission

We had to crank up our food emergency parcels. We distribute from a couple of big hubs and also to 50 small food banks. I knew there would be immediate demands on that. To meet the need, Auckland Council opened a large emergency food bank in Spark Arena.

Things were more complicated than normal because individuals could no longer donate food. It wasn't safe or possible within the distance rules. But we did more in that food space in the weeks since the alert levels were announced than ever before, and some more amazing things began to happen.

New Zealand produces enough calories to feed 20 million people. Yet 10 per cent of the population is food insecure and that might double in the future depending on the state of the economy. We've been trying to get this issue on the table for years and suddenly it was there.

Since Covid, I have seen huge generosity from growers and people helping with storage and distribution facilities. Finally, corporates, producers and manufacturers were sitting down with us and listening and wanting to be part of the solution.

We also managed to keep up our healthcare services for the most vulnerable. We have an excellent medical clinic at the Mission, which caters for street homeless and other high need people, and we have 1700 people enrolled. We set ourselves a goal of continuing to provide for everyone with very high needs and got that project underway. Medical teams were going out on the streets and into motels to help out and test for Covid when necessary.

I was working 14 hours a day and really missing Sue, but at the same time our being apart meant I could focus almost totally on the job. The other couple in the house were very supportive and we managed to have our evening meal together. It was a very different lifestyle. Work, dinner and usually an early morning and late evening walk around Mt Eden – or up it – and that was life every day.

Talk radio continued to do its job of giving people a chance to share their experiences and source some amateur counselling at the same time.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

We had a call in week two from a woman called Shirley who had lost her husband a year before. She told us how on the anniversary of his death she had stopped to mark the occasion with a glass of wine when the neighbours called her out the front of her house. When she went out, they were standing in front of their houses, raising a glass of wine to him too. On the other hand, there was the solo mother who had to go back to work and was worried that she would get criticism over how she was looking after her kids.

It was expected the crisis would create social problems, and people turned to the Mental Health Foundation with their concerns.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

I was busier in those few weeks than I had been in the whole year up till then. And the busier I got, the more stress it put on things domestically. We were able to get an iPad for one daughter and noise-cancelling headphones for Annabelle so she could work more efficiently, and we know we were lucky to be able to do that. For some families, that sort of expense is not an option.

My 80-plus-year-old parents were in a retirement village in Christchurch. They were used to the limits that come with that, but lockdown was a bit of a shock to them. But they rallied and embraced FaceTime and all that went with it and got connected with their kids and grandkids, probably more so than they did beforehand. I found I was ringing them a little bit more myself.

In theory, essential services that were allowed to keep running were in the best financial position. But operating in a Covid world presented all sorts of hidden challenges and costs.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

We acknowledged from the start that being able to carry on trading when so many businesses couldn't put us in a privileged position with a big responsibility. There had been quite a lot of heat about that. We stood back a bit and looked at things and what our role should be in this extreme situation. From that we created a set of commitments to New Zealand and we have been making our decisions based on them ever since.

First was a commitment to the safety of all employees, not just our own. If a supplier sent staff into our store, we were accountable for their safety in our place, including around Covid.

Second, we would do all we could to support New Zealand's Covid strategy and play a role in the country's economic recovery. It wasn't just about our business.

Third was that we were privileged having the ability to trade, so we had to look after the team and focus on making food available to everyone. That was our job in the team that was New Zealand.

Fourth, our stores would all have value to offer in the future. We were 98 years old with a strong balance sheet. This is the rainy day we built for, so we supported our stores, who are small businesses. None of our businesses claimed the wage subsidy. A few were 30 per cent down and qualified but we looked after them from the co-op.

Fifth, we allocated well over \$1 million to foodbanks and city

missions. We also supported Sam Johnson's Student Volunteer Army.

Previously we had four social promises as a business. One was providing affordable, healthy food – that now went to the top of the list. Then we had generating meaningful employment – and we added 1,600-plus people through all this. We also wanted to carry our suppliers with us through the crisis, so we committed to paying the small to medium ones within 10 days to keep their cashflow healthy. We wanted them to be able to take that commitment to the bank if they were looking for help there.

Finally, this crisis was changing how people lived. Some things would change permanently, and we had to evolve our business for that different New Zealand future.

Although many people had to – and did – adjust to working from home, they also had to keep living there, and domestic bubble life took on a variety of new flavours.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

There was nothing normal about our bubble. It was two entrepreneurs in the same house, both over-achievers wanting to do good. I spent the time doing a lot of big thinking, but we were both trying to help as many people as we could. I'm much more outward. Scottie is much more inward with his sheep milk business. He had a small bubble of people he shared stuff with, and we had just had a whole year of living apart. It couldn't have been a sharper contrast.

Unable to go to restaurants and with Uber Eats off the menu, people started turning to traditional ways of sourcing food – like cooking it – and turned their thoughts to what sort of future they would make on the other side of lockdown.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

I was cooking up a storm in those first few days because there was nothing else to do. The herb garden was resurrected to make yummy food. At my supermarket, I couldn't buy yeast or flour after lockdown but fortunately I had stocked up and there was the restaurant supply

to fall back on if necessary. I think I had got in touch with my inner doomsday prepper.

I realised that once this was over I'd need to adjust the product. I did see a downturn. It was only natural. I was worried but not too worried. I knew I would scrape something together. And I was very glad I wasn't going to be relying on tourism for the next 12 months. I had always based my restaurants in local neighbourhoods, never in areas that rely on tourists. That's always been my business model. I've been through a couple of downturns before, and I know when times are tough the neighbourhood will look after you.

For those who had stocked up on tools and materials, the lockdown was DIY heaven. Even more so if you'd been struggling to find time to build that icon of twenty-first century sustainability, a tiny house.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury

Primary school teacher

Our small house was great during this time. It was what we were doing anyway, by ourselves. When level four was announced, we had two days to stock up. Max, my partner, does essential work supporting a boy with special needs who lives independently but I had no parttime teaching in lockdown, so I was able to do a lot.

We got to the point where we needed someone to come and do the electrics and gas. An electrician was due to come the day before lockdown but didn't, so we did everything else we could, like lining the walls and putting in insulation.

We also run two blogs that have kept us really busy – a travel blog and a sustainable living blog that's centred around the tiny house. The travel blog was making enough money to sustain us while travelling but not enough to live off for two people in New Zealand. We thought about getting our sustainability blogging to that level and could if we put the time in.

School was out for all kinds of teachers during lockdown. Except home-school teachers, a role into which parents suddenly found themselves thrust with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Many families had never spent as much time together as they would for as long as lockdown lasted.

Sido Kitchin

Magazine editor

Home schooling was tricky. Cleo was in her last year of high school and needed lots of discussion as part of her way of learning. But she and her brother seemed to be thriving. At first, I was panicky about them not having their mates in their lives, but they had technology for at least some of that connection. And they seemed to love us being together 24/7.

Conrad showed his love and support by cooking for us, and we ate like kings. He went out and bought lots of games and puzzles, and whoever won the family game after dinner got to choose a movie. But soon we were getting, 'I'm not doing the family movie tonight, I'm meeting up with so-and-so on Zoom.' Hearing the laughter out of Cleo's room when she was hanging with mates online was brilliant.

We slowed right down. Everyone was healthy and happy. I still had my sad days, of course. I still worried about being unemployed and what that would mean financially. I'd never been unemployed before, but so many people were worse off than we were, and I did have some redundancy pay. I kept telling the kids that you couldn't compare the closure of a business to the devastation and loss of life that was happening the world over.

People who had devoted their lives to their work relished the time they suddenly had to think about their lives and reassess their priorities.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

Everything changed. It gave me time, time I had never had, to sit and to be, to accept that the world is the way it is because of us. I'm not one for travel, so that has never bothered me, whānau and mahi were/are my life. This time gave me the opportunity to put in order my priorities, which prior to this lockdown were not conducive with who I wanted to be.

Work has consumed a lot of my time and the face of how we deal with issues has changed. I started working from home, however our new whare does not have internet and although schools were officially 'out of bounds', I spent a lot of time there, answering emails, dealing with administrative procedures from the Ministry of Education and informing whānau and kaiako of what was happening,

I eventually received approval from the Ministry of Education's

Whangarei office to work on site. That became another safe place for me and my whānau. We now did our meetings as 'zui' (Zoom hui). This was a new learning. We created units of teaching in Google Classroom, another new technological learning for our staff and whānau, and email messages and phone calls were more used now. They took the place of face-to-face meetings.

Home became a place of learning also – learning how to make a 'shed' into a home, how to make a roast dinner with a gas burner, how to conserve power with seven people in the house and still enjoy living off the grid, how to enjoy a shower in the blustering wind when the shower was outside – the list went on. The ultimate learning was living with these unique opportunities and still seeing the wonder in everything around us. Our place was not ideal, we caught 13 mice in our traps since we moved in, because we lived on a virtual farm, in a shed, but we were happy. These were small challenges compared to the challenges others faced.

My son, daughter-in-law and moko girl moved to her parents' place during isolation. This separation was initially hard to have and we missed our moko so much, but I respected the choice they made and was happy that moko girl was surrounded in so much love. We were learning to be more positive as a whānau, to see the good in things and to turn our thoughts before they come out of our mouths. It was all a learning process, but one we were undertaking as a whānau.

We were learning to live together again, my adult children, their partners and my mokopuna. We were learning to accept each other's individuality and to understand that we all needed space to remember who we were and to appreciate each other. I appreciated the sacrifice my daughter-in-law and son-in-law had made to be part of this bubble. We all came together as one, at this time, for a reason, and to be very honest, I loved it.

CHAPTER 6

Alert Level 4: week three

9–15 APRIL

Total cases to date: 992

Total active cases: 921

Total deaths: 1

Total tests conducted: 55,685

9 April

World deaths pass 100,000.

In New Zealand, 29 new cases of the virus are reported. This is the lowest number of new cases since 23 March, before the lockdown began.

The Electoral Commission sidesteps calls by Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters to delay the general election, saying that planning for voting to take place even in a pandemic was well underway.

10 April

The death of a Christchurch woman in her nineties is the second due to Covid-19.

14 April

The official road death toll for Easter is zero.

Global cases pass 2 million.

Just a Thought launches Staying on Track – a free online therapy course to support wellbeing during Covid-19.

A specially formed group of local academics, led by public health experts, says New Zealand can and should come out of lockdown, and has proposed a Plan B to do that. Their claims that they cannot get media coverage for their alternative are widely reported.

15 April

The Prime Minister, cabinet ministers and officials, including

the Director-General of Health, take a 20 per cent pay cut.

Stats NZ reports cauliflower prices rose 64 per cent to a weighted average of \$5.75 per kilo in March. The high price of cauliflower had been much commented on, with lockdown getting the blame.

* * *

If there was a week of lockdown limbo, this was it. As the country entered its third week of near-inactivity, cases of Covid-19 continued to appear. The government's wage subsidy scheme helped thousands of workers through the immediate financial shock of the crisis, but thoughts turned to when and how economic activity would start again.

Although many professionals were able to conduct their law and accounting practices via Zoom from their spare bedrooms, essential workers continued to go to work outside the home, nursing patients in hospitals, caring for the elderly in residential care and stocking supermarket shelves.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

Lockdown brought home to a lot of people for the first time that the workers who actually keep society running are among the lowest paid. These are the people described as 'just a cleaner' or 'just an orderly'. E tū is the union of the low-paid people in essential jobs, and it was never good enough to us that they barely got the minimum wage. It certainly wasn't good enough when just going to work could put their lives at risk. They were being expected to work hard and get paid little for it, and in many cases, we had to fight to get them something as basic as personal protective equipment (PPE).

We knew worse was to come with the sustained economic impact that had been a bit hidden by the wage subsidy. A lot of people were about to be dislocated from their jobs. And we in the union started thinking: 'Is this it? Will we get through all this at tremendous personal cost then go back to the same old way of doing things, back to hospitals that are falling down, back to schools that don't have basic IT gear? And people being paid badly.' We said no. If we could unite to fight Covid, we could unite to fight for a better world.

Whenever there is a recession, like the global financial crisis in 2007 or the stock market crash in 1987, and New Zealand comes to a

standstill, business reacts by throwing people on the scrapheap. There is no training to equip them for new work. And in every case, when things pick up again and the rebuilding starts, they say we haven't got people with the skills we need.

Obviously, it's not easy to train people when everyone is in lockdown, but we knew this was the time to plan for what would come after. We wanted it to be different this time and we started to think about ways to make that happen. We could see real opportunities for New Zealand Inc to change. We began to look at reforms to things like training that would make a real difference.

Apprenticeships have always been an obvious case where the people who were badly off could end up being even worse off. If you're studying to be a lawyer, for instance, and decide you want to do a year or two's OE, or maybe you've had a baby and want to be a full-time carer for the first year, then you can do that and pick up your studies again down the track. But if you leave an apprenticeship part-way through, it's very hard to find an employer who will take you on again when you want to return to it. We wanted to find ways to make that possible. Apparently, an OE is a good thing to do, so why shouldn't everyone be able to do it? Or if people are on the dole, why don't we find ways to support them getting back to work however they could, rather than penalising them by docking their benefit every time they earn a little bit of money?

Funerals are a big expense for many families, and one that it seemed likely people would struggle to meet in a depressed economy, so they began to change.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

I didn't really want to do low-cost funerals, like direct cremations with no service or anything but the most basic offering. I'm not a fan of those. It's not because there is less money involved, I just don't feel like the farewell has been had. They're not beautiful in the way I think funerals should be. But at the end of the day we had to move the way the economy was moving, so we prepared to adapt what we provided for people until things picked up.

We would still provide the traditional service and charge accordingly, but we also came up with some more cost-effective options for people who might be struggling. We could streamline casket selection and not offer so much variety. There were a lot of

things we could cut out and ask families to do. They could organise the flowers and the order of service sheets. They could arrange the minister. Viewings of the loved one would just take place during normal work hours – nine to five and not in the evening or on the weekend – so we didn't have to charge overtime. It was pretty simple, the less we had to do, the less we would have to charge.

For the mayor of Queenstown, austerity extended to every business in the no-longer prosperous tourist mecca. Fortunately, its mayor was no stranger to cataclysms.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

Covid has not been my first rodeo. I went through a traumatic community event before, when I was CEO of Christchurch Airport at the time of the earthquake in 2011. That experience helped me deal with this. And I am fortunate to be married to a very supportive, strong lady. Our daughter was at home with us in lockdown and our son in Auckland rang frequently, so they were my great support while I was trying to support everyone else.

People react well to someone taking leadership and demonstrating a way forward. They need to feel someone is holding the steering wheel, pointing in the right direction, and early on I figured out that for the local community that person was me.

The problem we had was massive and we needed to find the path out of it. I formed two mayoral task forces. One was aimed at short-term recovery – how we created jobs and allowed people to put a meal on the table for their families. The other was more of a longer-term exercise about support for the community, how we manage the tourism industry in the future and how we diversify our economy to protect ourselves from similar events in the future.

One of the lovely things about our district is that we have some terribly smart people who live here – people like jeweller Michael Hill and Xero founder Rob Drury – who have done well and decided to make this the part of the world where they want to live. I wanted those people on the task force. I told them I didn't want their money, but I needed their brains.

There were a number of options for our future. The first question was how to get tourism up and running with no international visitors able to come into the country. I reminded everyone that about a third of the money spent in Queenstown was domestic tourism. There was a

good base of local visitors and it was our hope that, despite getting a kick in the wallet, people would still want to travel here.

Then we wanted to work with government on shovel-ready projects we had put forward as well as some of our own. We delivered a raft of projects that would generate economic activity and redeploy some unemployed people on the basis that if you weren't able to drive a jetboat anymore, maybe you could drive a digger.

In the longer term, we had to make sure we would be ready when international tourism recovered. Mothballing your business to save money is fine, but we needed to make sure those guys would be ready to go again when the international travellers came back.

Finally, it was obvious we needed to change our complete reliance on tourism. We had played around with that in the past but now we had to get really serious.

I had lots of good ideas put to me. One was a concept called 'In the Wild', coming up with conservation-based projects from eradicating pests to native planting to getting rid of gorse. It's much better to work with the government to get unemployed people working than putting them on the benefit.

Whatever the solutions, however innovative they were and however long they took to put into place, there was no escaping the reality that there was more bad news on the economy to come and a day of reckoning that accountants would need to prepare for.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

The downside of opening up the floodgates of government money and dealing with it later is that the later will come. A huge amount of tidying up will have to be done.

The wage subsidy was good, but the tax stuff was a bit lightweight. The government threw out a lot of tax legislation to help smooth the path. For example, the Inland Revenue Department said that if you paid taxes late because you didn't have the cashflow, they would write off penalties and interest. But to do that, they said, 'Don't get in touch with us now. Do what you need to do and get in touch down the track. We will remit the penalties.'

There will be a huge amount of compliance backlog to get through, meaning a lot of work for us. Any dealings with the IRD are time-consuming.

On the business operation side, a lot of clients who are short of cash will come out solvent but with very little wriggle room and at a time where people will have little spending power. There will be some tricky conversations with banks, who will want to support businesses but not throw good money after bad, so compliance and just keeping businesses going will take up our time, rather than being able to focus on more positive things like business growth and development.

Bridging the gap to help those at risk of being left behind took its toll on those on the front line, even doing something as basic as sourcing and delivering food to people who couldn't get out to shop.

Sam Johnson

Student Volunteer Army

I hit a bit of a wall after several weeks in a row of waking up every day and getting hit by the freight train that is the Student Volunteer Army. I spoke to one of my mentors last week and talked about the emotional strain and the need to have time out and time to myself and I've been trying to do that.

There have been various stresses. I know from the earthquake experience that it is easy to design things that involve lots of people if you work with central government. There has been some frustration in this case dealing with local entities who are used to doing things their way.

I also panicked a couple of weeks ago because we actually had too many people wanting to help. I got the scale of the thing wrong and came up against the stoicism of people who didn't feel comfortable asking for help even when they obviously needed it. We worked out that we shouldn't ring and say, 'Do you need some help?' because they would just say no. But if we rang and said, 'Would you like some groceries delivered?' they said yes and gave us their shopping list right off the top of their head.

I've realised too that how lockdown feels depends very much on where you are locked down. I was speaking to a cousin who lives in Fairlie in the Mackenzie Country and he said it hasn't changed anything as far as his lifestyle went.

For those with mental health problems and related issues, used

to relying on specialised support networks, new ways of doing things had to be found. And once again, lockdown had some unexpectedly beneficial consequences.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

I run a peer support group for suicide-bereaved people. It's been going for 18 years and I have been facilitating face-to-face meetings once a month for five years plus. Because we couldn't do our April meeting face to face, we had a Zoom meeting. There were 21 people joining in and, in my experience, it was the first time that a peer support group met online that way.

Meeting as a group is important. A number of those people live by themselves – but also with their grief. They might have had an anniversary or significant birthday while on their own. Anniversaries were a big theme of the meeting – they came up a lot in the discussion. One woman in the group had lost a partner to suicide.

It was really powerful hearing people say how good it was to talk. Also, three or four of the members no longer lived in Auckland so hadn't been able to attend the regular monthly meetings. There is nothing like it anywhere else, so they were reconnecting with their suicide-bereaved whānau and got so much out of that reconnection.

Grief can be tactile, about being physically present with people and involve a lot of touching and holding as well as listening and talking.

Zoom was good because as facilitator I could introduce and nominate people and get them going. No one was giving advice – it was all about having a moment where they could offload.

I did a survey of what people thought and got 19 responses, all positive.

Many of them hadn't quite realised how alone with their grief they were. Being alone with grief can be quite dangerous. It's when you can slide into seeing life as pretty shit.

Grief and how to manage it would become a major theme of discussion about lockdown arrangements, in particular for those who lost a loved one during this time. Their grief became focused on funeral directors, who had to enforce the government's rules.

Kaiora Tipene

Funeral director

We were dealing with all sorts of new pressures about things that normally wouldn't have been a problem.

We had to make massive decisions without families present. For instance, there was a case where the deceased and his children lived in Whangarei, but he died in Auckland.

We needed documents signed to go ahead with the cremation they wanted but the family couldn't go to a local stationery place to get anything printed to sign. I asked for someone to write a letter on Facebook or email a statement saying: 'I give permission for Tipene Funerals to cremate my dad.' I needed it in some kind of writing. I needed to be safe because you can't go back on a cremation.

There was another case where a daughter hadn't been in her late father's bubble, so she wasn't allowed to visit the body.

'Is Dad still with you?' she asked.

'Yes.'

'Please take the phone to him.'

'Here he is – you can talk to him.'

'Daddy, I'm sorry I'm not there.' She was crying. Then she started a karanga over the phone.

There were some bright moments where families used Zoom or Skype and interacted with whānau across the world and that helped them. But for those who couldn't do that, it was hard.

It was a shitty time for us. The challenge was having to witness whānau going through loss and inform them of what they couldn't do. A lot of whānau tried to salvage what they could to practise tikanga. It was weird at first to witness karanga on the phone. You're sitting at the back of the chapel and you can hear it being performed. Then a karakia, then a mihi, all with no one there except the family from the deceased's bubble acknowledging everything.

Away from thoughts of work and major life events, the humdrum of daily life continued as kind of normal.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

It was quite surreal – you think life is actually quite normal, yet it was completely different. Your mind suddenly realised... this isn't normal. There were days where you couldn't function very well because of it. Jo, my wife, is at home anyway so her routine was not that different. The kids went a bit mental but there are parks nearby for them to work off energy.

Nascent lockdown rituals, such as neighbours bellowing conversations from property to property over a wine at dusk, sprang up but soon lost their novelty value.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

Talkback calls from worried listeners soon dried up. I think people just got used to lockdown. At the start, they didn't know what it was going to be like. They were petrified about their freedoms being curbed and coping on their own. It was a big shock. But by week three, everyone had got used to it. At that point, the deckchairs had gone from the front of houses and my street was completely deserted.

For those who liked the work they were now doing from home, there was the unique experience of being able to work from the moment they woke up in the morning till the moment they went to sleep at night – if they weren't careful.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

Partly because of the work we were engaged in – trying to save our union members' jobs – I was busier than usual. It was intense, with long hours, seven days a week – though not quite such long hours on Saturday and Sunday.

I had always been one for doing things personally, but now I could see that working remotely worked. I felt a bit disloyal because we had members whose jobs relied on people flying.

There was no gulf between home and work. I got up at six o'clock and got ready for work like I was leaving the house, because I have to have routine otherwise I'd end up playing guitar all day.

But what was really nice was that at about 6.30pm I walked into the lounge and had a glass of wine with Kerry. I might come back and do half an hour or so later, but there was a cut-off.

A couple of times – and this was probably highly illegal – we walked to a local bushy area that looks over the water. There are two seats there about two metres apart from each other. We sat on one with a bottle of wine and our friend Margo would walk down and sit on the other seat with her glass of wine and have a chat.

CHAPTER 7

Alert Level 4: week four

16–22 APRIL

Total cases to date: 1084

Total active cases: 622

Total deaths: 9

Total tests conducted: 74,401

16 April

The first random coronavirus testing takes place in a Queenstown supermarket carpark. More than 340 people are tested. None are positive.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern speaks about what a move out of lockdown and into Alert Level 3 will look like.

20 April

The Prime Minister announces a move to level three at 11.59pm Monday 27 April and extends Alert Level 4 a week longer than originally announced. Schools and early childhood centres can prepare to reopen on 29 April, with 28 April being designated as a teachers only day.

21 April

Economic Development Minister Phil Twyford gives details of a little-known category for border exemptions: for foreigners deemed essential to a project of ‘significant economic value’.

* * *

The medical fight against Covid was moved up a notch this week with the introduction of random testing. There had been criticism of a perceived low number of tests across the country to date. However, there were also signs that the lockdown and closed borders were working, and New Zealand was not seeing the terrible Covid-19 statistics that were becoming evident in

other countries. In fact, personal health was low on the list of national concerns. Most attention for those in lockdown was focused on the Prime Minister's announcement that New Zealand would go into a fifth week at Alert Level 4 before moving to Alert Level 3 at one minute to midnight on Monday, 27 April. Approaching a month in lockdown, the benefits of isolation were becoming more apparent, but so were the costs . . .

Early support for the work of Auckland City Mission in the crisis had been quick to appear. The question remained whether it would continue as the lockdown ground on.

Chris Farrelly

CEO Auckland City Mission

The Prime Minister joined one of our all-staff meetings as a visitor – not for too long but enough to give us a few words of thanks and acknowledgement. Her time, encouragement and gratitude to our staff was a real tonic for everyone. We felt noticed and understood.

We knew our country produced enough food to feed everyone; we just had to get it to the people who needed it. At the second half of level four, things gathered momentum. We began to see the generosity of what we had in our country. There were amazing, joined-up conversations between ourselves, growers, distributors, parts of government and corporates. The theme of the conversations was: 'Now is our time. Can we get a system in place to feed everyone?' We had been longing to have that conversation for years.

In our case, corporates have a capacity around systems, structures and intellectual knowhow that the likes of us didn't have.

We sent a lot of food to two big marae – Papakura and Ngā Whare Waatea – with whom we had a relationship. We wanted to enable them to become distribution centres in their own right, rather than being dependent on us. The food would go to them to distribute – it was tino rangatiratanga at work. They had been our partners for years. They were big marae with great infrastructure and relationships with their people. Covid gave us an opportunity to change things rapidly.

We saw this as something wonderful that could grow into the future. They have access to land and other resources through iwi connections, which opened up possibilities for food production.

That said, and as good as it was, we were still keen to see income

levels being raised. That was the only thing that would end food poverty permanently and there wasn't as much happening on that front as we would like.

At essential business Foodstuffs, the six commitments to New Zealand were being put into practice in new ways.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

In week four of lockdown we put aside over \$1 million for when New Zealand needed it. I had the privilege of calling city missions, food banks, Ronald McDonald House and a number of other organisations to say, 'We are here and want to help.'

Those groups are getting food out to the people who need help to get it. With our resources, we can help with not just money but logistics as well. We began lifting our sights from our own immediate concerns to focus on the world around us. Every individual and organisation was feeling shipping pressure – if you want 200 cartons of baked beans, we could work on methods to help keep a smooth flow going. We were still as busy as ever, but we were delivering on our social commitments.

We did regular mood checks on the customers at our stores. I found 44 per cent of them were extremely worried about the economy, 22 per cent about personal finances and 16 per cent about health at this time; it had flipped from the first weeks

Being aware of our privileged position as a business that could keep operating when so many couldn't, I was pleased to see that there was a lot of trust in our supermarkets – 81 per cent trusted us to be operating in the right way.

It was also interesting to see the effects lockdown was having on shopping habits. Perhaps predictably, online shopping was a new normal, at rates two to three times higher than pre-Covid. And on our websites people were doing a lot of searches for baking recipes – feijoa crumble was the hot favourite in week four.

We also noted that since they couldn't get their usual takeaways, people were trying to make their favourites at home. We had a lot of customers buying Thai and Indian ingredients. And that was the week I found out that a popular recipe for homemade KFC used a lot of celery salt, so demand for that went crazy.

Other things we saw being searched for were USB cables, jigsaws and other puzzles. Lockdown life was clearly starting to get boring

and people were getting desperate.

We had to work hard to keep our supply chain running smoothly. We were shifting 50 per cent more volume, it was like Christmas week every week for weeks on end, and that in turn put pressure on manufacturers. They simply couldn't make enough frozen foods and other core items. There was some reorganising done – for instance, you can supply more potato chips if you go from having 10 sizes and flavours down to five, because you can do bigger runs without interruption.

We also started working and sharing information with members of Retail New Zealand, the retailers' trade organisation. Some of its members are our competitors but that didn't bother us because we believed it was important to get all New Zealand business back to normal as fast as we could.

We shared all the safety, employment and operational resources we had created through lockdown with other retailers via the Food and Grocery Council. We offered Zoom calls with myself and our experts in safety, retail operations and other fields, so we could share our lessons with the businesses who'd been closed during lockdown.

We began to think about the economic pressure that would soon be affecting the whole population. What could we do around pricing essentials at a level that reflected where the economic hurt was going to be? We started looking at getting private label products at prices that would work for people.

Two to three months ago, having food that was tasty and fancy was important. Now it was going to be about how to make life work on a different budget. We want to provide basics that will be as affordable as possible to deal with the other part of this crisis – the economic crisis.

Outside essential industries, there were even signs of hope in the humble world of ginger beer and syrups.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

One striking thing this week, as opposed to my earlier gloomy prediction, was that on the twentieth of the month a lot more people paid us than we had expected. We thought that was very encouraging. Our ginger products aren't usually at the top of our clients' lists, so the fact that they paid for what they had already had suggested they planned to buy more, which suggested that they intended sticking

around and making sure they would have everything they needed when they reopened – whenever that would be.

Even PR campaigns were kept alive by the effort of positive PR campaigners. And their clients were showing signs of life too.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

We kept it together as best as possible. Three times a week the leadership team checked in and then they would check in with their teams. We were being as creative as possible, coming up with new business ideas and new projects for existing clients. There were two types of response, poles apart. A lot of them were coming through. They were saying let's do it when we hit level two. The ones with courage and vision were saying yes. Others had retreated into their shells. In some cases, you wondered why they were in business.

The possibility that being in stop-the-world-I-want-to-get-off mode opened the way for some transformative thinking to take hold in some quarters – particularly in the innovative, digitally oriented, entrepreneurial demographic.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

I spent a lot of time in week four thinking about theories to give hope. One in particular seemed to be having a moment – it was Kate Raworth's 'doughnut economics', which is a kind of economics centred around sustainability and social values. It shifts work priorities away from those of traditional economics.

Then I began thinking about having more time and who we spend it with in a post-Covid world. Having had the virus, I want to know that the people I do business with or shop with are safe.

Flossie had done health and safety guidelines for salons and for small businesses in general. These are two-way wellness checks, so each side knows the other side is safe. We have to be able to trust other people's bubbles.

A lot of things are going to change. I decided I was not buying anything. I was growing my grey out. Maybe my salon clients would

change their ownership model – with people visiting less often, they might choose to share ownership with others. With human contact something to be avoided until there was a vaccine, the reception desk would be a thing of the past. All booking would be done online, time in the chair would be minimised, and you would only see one person at the salon – the one doing your hair.

For some, lockdown time was also time to consider some life changes.

Sam Hardy

Mental health advocate

At work, some people had noticed I washed my hands quite a lot and didn't drink liquids or use the toilet. So, at a meeting on video with my colleagues, I just told them about my OCD. They took it really well. My bosses had known about it for a while. I told them almost a year ago because I thought it was best my manager know. In terms of talking to colleagues, this was the first time. I gave them the explanation before a Facebook page I was starting went live. I'd been looking for something to get involved with, and being cooped up – plus the nature of Covid-19 – was a big inspiration to doing that.

Businesses for which human-to-human contact was central had already changed to adjust to Covid. Even if that change was envisaged as temporary, it involved a lot of new ways of working for those concerned, and confusion over traditional Māori burial practices only seemed to be getting worse.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

Our staff are in a work bubble as well as their private home bubbles. We have showers at work that everyone uses. They no longer wear suits at work unless they are doing funerals. The rest of the time I get them to wear scrubs. It's not pleasant, but I can't afford to dry clean a suit after every arrangement. I have spent a fortune on masks. Fifty flimsy disposable ones cost \$82 and I have bought hundreds of them.

We tried arranging funerals remotely, but it just didn't work. We are allowed to have two family members [from the deceased's

bubble]. As long as two family members come, we have an arrangement table, signs and sanitiser and they get gloves and masks and we sit two metres apart.

Kaiora Tipene

Funeral director

I had a case this week where the guidelines didn't seem to be working. I approved a whānau taking their loved one to be buried in an ancestral urupā. They were going to drive the body down from Auckland, the iwi would dig the hole, the family would bury the body, backfill it and drive straight back to Auckland. I didn't see any risk for the family travelling in their bubble with their loved one.

Then I got a call from the Ministry of Health asking why I approved the whānau to leave. I said they were being safe, practising movements within their bubble. I didn't see any risk, I felt direct burial was essential travel. As a funeral director, I would have had every right to do that, so I didn't see what difference it made for the family to do it.

The Ministry said no. I asked them to put it in writing for me to forward to the family and that happened. They said all they wanted to do was bury their mum.

'Will you stop us if we come and do a haka at 2am and take my mum?' they asked.

The email I got made it clear that if the whānau insisted, I should contact the police. I got in touch with the police iwi liaison officer. He said he didn't see any problem with the family going if they went directly to the urupā. Thank you. I let the whānau go.

What bothered me was the Ministry of Health putting obstacles in the way of this family. I couldn't sleep properly last night knowing this whānau felt the ministry was stopping them going.

They had come to me with options. They had a plan for doing it safely. They asked if I could make it happen. Sure, I could. I may have broken guidelines a bit.

The police rang today, and I told them only two vehicles had left. The body was in one and extra drivers were in another to cover the two eight-hour drives in one day.

The police said there wasn't a problem. They had just had a call from a checkpoint and wanted to make sure the whānau had got where they needed to go.

'I thought you were going to tell me you were going to send them back here,' I said.

'Not yet.'

I also had a call from a Gisborne police iwi liaison officer. I told him the plan and he said he would clear them through the last

checkpoint. They police were okay with it provided whānau did what they said they would.

It wasn't an isolated incident. This week, we had two deceased leave in the middle of the night – one at two o'clock and one at three – because they were planning to get to the urupā at about 11, do the burial straight away and come straight back.

At Alert Level 3, I understood that inter-regional repatriation for funerals would be allowed, which would avoid a lot of this conflict.

We had a case where the deceased lived with one daughter and her children, but another daughter went in regularly to care for her. That daughter asked me, 'Don't I have the right to see my mum? Please can I come in and see her? I think I have a right because I cared for her when she was sick. I visited her for treatment, gave her dialysis while my sister had a break.'

I saw no risk there if we managed everything properly, so I made the decision to allow it.

Throughout all this, we have had the highest cremation rate Tipene Funerals has seen. So many whānau have decided to cremate their loved ones and hold onto their ashes until such time as they can have a proper tangi with everyone who wants to be there in attendance.

In other cases, we were keeping the loved ones safe on our premises until they could be removed for burial. One day, I looked into my chapel and I could see 10 loved ones ready and waiting to go home. They are in our care. We speak to them and every morning have a little waiata for them. They are staying there until, hopefully under Alert Level 3, they can be released. Until then, their iwi had a rāhui in place and were not allowing burials at all. If iwi had been putting up a fight to allow them back, I would let them go.

Even with the best intentions, the cracks started to show in domestic life. Families that had been making the most of it with themed dress-up dinners, international Zoom quizzes and Sunday night talent shows were also feeling the pressure.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

'Groundhog Day' was a phrase you started to hear a lot of people using, especially me. Many people also claimed to have a new understanding of what a sentence of home detention would really be like. Under normal circumstances, being on the farm felt like a break.

It was anything but that if you didn't have any other options. If it was a break, it was very much an enforced one being taken under duress.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

It was Groundhog Day in lockdown this week. As far as we were concerned, we were all a bit stir crazy and working to keep plugging on through. Thanks partly to the time it had taken to set the practice up to work from home, I was still trying to get 2019 stuff finished for clients. The normal March workload had been pushed back a month.

The promise of relief from Groundhog Day came with the announcement that the country would be moving to Alert Level 3 on 28 April. Everyone had forgotten what it felt like when they were at level three for a couple of days a month previously, and there was muted enthusiasm in some quarters, where it was described as 'level four with McDonald's'. If it had been business as unusual at your day job in lockdown so far, Alert Level 3 didn't offer a lot to get excited about. It permitted people to combine bubbles. It did not allow travel between regions.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

Inside our world that didn't change much because we knew what it would look like. The best news was that we could serve coffee, hot chicken and chips, and milkshakes. We spent quite a bit of time on that and making sure we could guarantee what we would do. It was probably the first week we could think about how we would get back to 'normal'.

Coffee would require a single barista wearing gloves. They would hand you your cup, then you would be responsible for your hand hygiene. Ice cream and milkshakes, we could do, too. Chicken and chips, we could do if they were boxed up ready to go and the customers weren't picking unwrapped food out of the hot cabinet.

I found it fascinating that people would not be allowed to use Keep Cups because of the risk of virus transmission. Only one-time-use disposable cups could be used. This was fascinating – all the energy that had been expended around sustainability and the green economy had been parked. If we had been able to produce single-use plastic bags, people would have been so glad to have them back.

We had also been seeing some police coming into stores telling

staff what they couldn't do. I told the store owners not to fight it. Talk to the locals, explain our process and safety. The police were basically on our side and thought they were doing the right thing, but with limited knowledge.

It was just nice to be getting back to some of the old things.

Uppermost in many minds was whether or not the country was risking its hard-won gains by moving to level three. At this stage, the voices saying New Zealand over-reacted with the severity of its lockdown were few. The voices expressing concern that we might undo all the results the country had achieved with its sacrifice were far more prevalent.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

I thought a lot about the move to level three. One of the things New Zealand said it did was move fast and move first. I hoped we weren't moving too fast out of it. We had done our four weeks. We had taken a massive blow to our business. We had made the sacrifice and were prepared to ride it out. I'd rather we did another week or two weeks and came out of it with a Covid-free environment. That would be amazing. It would mean we could put a premium on travel experiences here.

Some thought that, health pros and cons notwithstanding, the population wasn't ready to move down a level, having just got the hang of the last one.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

I thought we needed to guts out a couple more weeks of level four. The benefits of doing that at this point would have far-reaching consequences on our speedier recovery. Level three felt a bit muddy – not as well articulated as level four. I witnessed that over the weekend when going out and about with the kids. The streets seemed to be occupied by stressed people yelling at other people not to get too close. I think the feeling that we were nearly out of this led people to lose it a bit.

I had only just got in the groove of it myself after four and a half weeks of it. I felt like a really slow learner, having just learnt how to cope with level four as we might be about to emerge from it. The truth was I liked waking up in the morning and not hearing the noise of traffic and people rushing to work. I didn't care that the kids weren't learning in the way they normally would. I cared about us as a nation making as good a recovery as we can and maybe another two weeks could make a huge difference.

But the economic imperative was uppermost in the minds of many. Sooner or later, the country had to start earning again, and for those in Auckland's always febrile real estate market, sooner was definitely the better option.

Gary Wallace

Real estate salesperson

We're ahead of the curve and the numbers are quite impressive. If we get on top of contact tracing that will be fantastic. My pick is the sensible thing would be to get through Anzac weekend and then go to level three where people can operate safely; that to me seems logical. A lot of people are hurting and need to be able to get back to their jobs.

We had bought a property in Grey Lynn and were meant to settle on 2 April. We couldn't do a pre-settlement inspection because of lockdown, so this was delayed until level three, along with many of our clients who had to wait till moving companies were back operating. We had organised a painter, who was a one-man band, so as soon as we were in level three, he could start working and self-isolate and begin earning money again. Things like that will be important.

This sort of concern led some people to make their own versions of Alert Level 3 in the best interests of those they served. Schools were allowed but not obliged to reopen on Wednesday 29 April and many chose to wait.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

I sent a pānui to our whānau asking them to please keep students home at level three. We would be expected to keep social distancing at kura, a huge dilemma with 110 tamariki! Our babies are social, so it would be impossible to keep them out of each other's bubbles, and there were many other areas in which it would be impossible to keep everyone safe, once isolation bubbles were broken. We had pregnant whānau members, newborn babies, kuia and kaumātua, immune-deficient whānau in homes – they are the most vulnerable,

Although I may not have been portraying the same message as our government about returning to kura at level three, I was adamant that this was the best decision for our kura, for our whānau and for our beautiful babies.

CHAPTER 8

Alert Level 4: week five

23–27 APRIL

Total cases to date: 1112

Total active cases: 370

Total deaths: 16

Total tests conducted:
108,238

23 April

The New Zealand Herald reports government auditing of Covid-19 wage subsidy claims has resulted in 39 applicants being asked to refund money and that 897 voluntarily offered to pay back all or some of the taxpayer cash.

24 April

World deaths pass 200,000.

25 April

As traditional Anzac Day gatherings aren't possible, New Zealanders are encouraged to stand at their gates or on their balconies at dawn to salute the fallen.

A Wellington wedding cluster becomes the first cluster to be closed by health authorities, after recording no new cases for 28 days.

26 April

Drug-funding agency Pharmac says it will need more money to continue its work in the light of Covid-related disruption.

27 April

World cases pass 3 million.

On the Thursday-to-Thursday cycle of lockdown weeks, the country had four days of an extra fifth week at Alert Level 4. This gave medical experts a few more days to monitor results and ensure the level of transmission was low enough for the move to be safely made to Alert Level 3. It also gave those working out in the world time to ensure they had all the necessary safety procedures in place. Preparations for going to level three stretched across two weeks.

The extension also meant Anzac Day, the nation's most solemn public holiday, commemorating the fallen in all its wars, would have to be marked under lockdown. Anzac Day has grown in popularity for years and is always a focus for feelings around national pride, endeavour and sacrifice.

As the day of the move drew nearer, unions, with work conditions uppermost in their minds, would have liked even more time before moving to Alert Level 3.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

My view was that although industry was really pushing to get back to work, it had to be Covid-safe work. I was engaged across industries negotiating workplace safety programmes for level three, and I couldn't see how we would be ready for that at midnight on Wednesday. I would have liked businesses to say let's hold our breath, get the safety standards right, then put processes in the workplace to meet them and get everyone back on the day after Anzac Day. I didn't want people going back to work and then having the workplace closed down by Worksafe or the union.

After so many weeks of what had become the new abnormal, the opportunity to indulge again in relatively minor activities took on major importance. Pick-up food orders were sanctioned and everyone from fine dining restaurants to burger joints planned to provide them. Somehow, the possibility of a trip to a fast-food drive-through assumed enormous importance.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

It was really level four with takeaways. I couldn't understand the country's obsession with its stomach and what they were going to order at McDonald's, especially considering we'd been eating much more than we should have. People were planning their first meal at level three like it would be their last one on the planet. I would rather save money and go to a fine restaurant when they finally opened. From lockdown in Paparoa I found it frustrating looking online at restaurants like Sidart and Sid at the French Café and places that were just around the corner from my home in Auckland and seeing their click-and-collect delivery options.

And we were reminded once again that coffee was a national obsession – an important sign that all was right with the world.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

I was upset about not being able to get a mocha in lockdown and looked forward to that at level three. It made me realise that before Covid there had been mornings when I was a right jerk going to the coffee shop up the road, getting impatient with the people round me. I vowed never to do that again. I realised we have taken each other for granted and need to talk to each other more. I will always be thankful to our baristas and not rush, make sure they are okay too.

For those trying to lead a sustainable lifestyle, even something as simple as being able to get a coffee brought its own Covid-specific dilemmas.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury

Primary school teacher

We had been missing coffee a lot. Even when we were working on our tiny house, we went to our nearby coffee roaster once a day. They were opening up at level three but wouldn't take Keep Cups. Only disposable cups were being used because of the risk of transmission. That was important to us. Did we do it, because we hadn't had coffee for so long, or could we hang out?

For small business suppliers, the small-scale reality of Alert Level 3 was unlikely to match the widely promised benefits.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

We knew there wouldn't actually be that many cafés reopening. We supply one regularly that would have been a typical case. They were planning to open and try to do some business, but they already knew they wouldn't make any money from the few customers they would get, and the staffing and other arrangements they would have to make would be so complicated it would hardly be worthwhile.

Watching how others behaved in lockdown was itself enough to create concern.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

As the day grew nearer, I was feeling very anxious about moving to level three. I worried we would muck this up when the brakes came off. I saw someone on Facebook saying we needed to hang out together because isolation was bad for our immune systems. People had been trying to push the boundaries of what they could do at level four and they would do that even more at level three. I heard of a street that decided it would be a bubble so they could all have dinner together – and they got away with it. They were lucky – there was no contact with a case. But the more we fudged it the greater the chance we would make things worse.

The public took their concerns to talk radio.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

We were still the voice of reassurance. There were still lots of questions people needed answering, especially people who hoped they might be able to restart their businesses. A single mother with a cleaning company called and talked about her worries, and many people got in touch later to support her by offering work.

The guidelines for schools were complex, but where they were ignored officialdom took an interest.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

I got a letter from the Ministry of Education saying they had heard we had directed to whānau that we wouldn't pull them in to the kura. I explained to them that wasn't correct. We were supporting parents to have freedom of choice and were offering offsite learning, not closing the kura.

If there was an obsession to rival coffee or fast food – in Auckland at least – it was buying and selling property, and Alert Level 3 meant agents were back in business.

Vicki Wallace

Real estate salesperson

We would be allowed to show people homes again and have online auctions at level three. The phone started to ring as soon as the announcement was made.

In the old days, we had 20 to 30 people rolling up to the front door for an open home. That wouldn't be happening. There was a whole new code of conduct.

All of a sudden, selling a house was going from a casual scenario to a real regime of dotting i's. The protocols were that before we engaged with the buyer, we emailed forms to get all their details. They would only be able to inspect with one other person from their bubble. We would have to maintain social distancing. Before and after they entered the home, we would have to wipe down all surfaces and door handles.

We were only permitted to take two buyers per property per day. This was important for vendors too. They were still in lockdown, so they couldn't just pop out to the gym while an inspection was on. Or they might be doing home schooling, but children were required to leave the house during an inspection.

We had four to five properties that were coming to market just before lockdown so would be getting those going again. We were excited. We were really ready to get back into some sort of normality.

The rites and rules of working from home loomed large throughout lockdown. Those who had been doing it for years couldn't see what all the fuss was about and why there was so much discussion about when to get out of your dressing gown and whether you had to wear pants on Zoom meetings.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

I prefer working in an office 100 per cent, all things being equal. I realise a lot of my work can be done without that – a large part of a comms job is communicating, after all, by phone or email – but a lot of what we do is collaborative, and though you can do that online it's not the same.

At the office, I love having a yarn with workmates. At home, there is no one to complain to when I'm unhappy. I complain to the management and she just tells me to get over it then goes into her room and slams the door.

I liked that when I did have a full-on day working from home, I could just leave my desk and go for a walk around the neighbourhood.

I spoke to someone who said she would likely never go back to her workplace again even though she would still be working for the same business. She can do everything from home, and this highlighted that. Offices will become drop-in centres – drop stuff off, pick stuff up.

I would imagine when we go back to the office it will be deep into level one.

The advantages of working from home continued to dawn on people who had avoided it.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

I had always been one for doing things personally. The word 'union' implies being with other people, but in lockdown I could see that remote works. Longer term adjustments will happen, but it's great to have the ability to effectively communicate without having to be in the same space.

An office environment brought with it a certain automatic discipline that promoted good work habits.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

I think I'd have been very unmotivated if I had been working from home. I lost a lot of motivation anyway. Normally, I do a lot of exercise, but in lockdown I probably went for three walks in the first 30 days. I had a list of jobs around the house that I didn't even begin. I had a list of books I wanted to read and hadn't opened. I had dreams of learning dance routines, learning new songs on the piano, but I think I touched a keyboard once. I watched a lot of Netflix. If I come out maintaining the same weight I went in with it will be a win. I observed the same in the people around me – in week one they started hard-out achieving things, but they pretty quickly fell off the wagon.

But for someone with OCD, the safety of working from home could itself be a trap.

Sam Hardy

Mental health advocate

Part of me didn't want to go back to the office because I enjoyed the day more at home. I didn't have to worry about using the work toilet, so I didn't have to limit my consumption. I could drink as much as I wanted and eat breakfast and be very comfortable. But at the same time, I felt the need to go back to work and get back to reality. I didn't want to go back, but I needed to.

I hoped that when I was instructed to go back – which probably wouldn't be until level two – I would be able to. I can never anticipate how something will go in terms of my OCD. I wouldn't know if there were any issues until I went back. I like to think it's going to be how it was before I left, but I might get to work and realise there are things troubling me that weren't before.

Working from home – especially if that work had a big impact on the wellbeing of others – made it dangerously easy to put in longer and longer hours, but there could be big rewards.

Chris Farrelly

CEO Auckland City Mission

This week, for the first time in five weeks, utter tiredness and exhaustion hit me like a brick, so the long weekend was just magnificent. Normally I'd have my wife beside me making sure this exhaustion was not happening. It's been a mixed blessing not having her here – it's enabled me to do the work but left me quite bereft.

But there were aspects of our work that started to develop in amazing ways. Albert Camus once said, 'In midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer.' In my world, there was incredible hope and new life in two areas: food, where our demands are enormous and growing, and housing. This started in lockdown and just kept going.

We had 353 people in emergency accommodation – motels and shelters and the like. These weren't just homeless people, but vulnerable ones. We couldn't put them back onto the street when lockdown was over. There would be an ethical, moral and justice course to keep these people housed.

We had been talking to government and the outcome we learnt was that they would put \$107 million into moving all these people into permanent accommodation. All this in one week, as a consequence of Covid and a huge housing supply coming onto the market. That was housing intended for student accommodation and no longer needed because the overseas students wouldn't be coming. Now it could be used to house our own people. Worried landlords had begun offering their properties for rent.

One woman who had 26 Airbnb units in Auckland rang us. How many more like that were out there, I wondered.

That disconnect had been there for so long – people without homes when there were so many empty homes; people without food when there was so much food waste. It was amazing that the Covid crisis had enabled something to be done about these issues. I hoped similar things were happening in other parts of the country and was being told it was.

Our role is making this continue and stick. Groups like us have to use this opportunity to get things in place for the long term.

Large organisational challenges faced providers at every end of the market and on every point on the social scale, from the homeless person needing a feed, to the homeowner needing to feed their family.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

It felt like 80 per cent of my time went into keeping up with running the business, 40 per cent into strategic responses and another 30 per cent into managing stakeholders. That added up to 150 per cent, but that is just how it was for everyone.

However, we used the last days at level four to plan as much as possible. We'd had a good guess at what Alert Level 3 would look like and got it pretty right. As before, there was no playbook for this. The government gets criticised when someone takes a unique situation and says, 'Your rules don't work.' Our view was, 'Don't be disappointed if what they say doesn't perfectly cover everything, because how would they know?'

However, their principles were really clear, and we applied them to our situation. 'Communicate back what you are doing and keep going.' That has helped us avoid tension with government and agencies.

Tension was the order of the day for those trying to balance the competing claims of Covid safety, cultural traditions and the emotionally raw state of bereaved families.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

We would have liked more structure in terms of arrangements, especially for viewing. This is the first time we have had to hold the bodies for so long – often the whānau took them home to stay there between the death and the tangi. This was not permitted because the government was trying to avoid gatherings and there was a risk with our families. They would promise to limit numbers and we would send them home and then there might be 50 people there. It is a time of grief and families will do what they want and celebrate the best way they can.

Kaiora Tipene

Funeral director

I wasn't happy with a lot of this. I said to my husband, 'Francis, what defines a funeral service now? Can we still say, "Yes you can have a funeral service, but it looks like this."? Can we say, "You can celebrate a life, but it will have to look like this."?'

I would say you can have your bubble, with a limit of 10 people at

the moment. You can still have karakia and himene – some of those ceremonial moments that make up a funeral service can still be practised.

Does a funeral service have to have a priest? Does it have to have numbers of people? Does it have to have speeches? Can it not just be a moment with your loved one? It was a learning curve for us all.

In level three there would be new guidelines. Whānau would be able to do inter-regional transfers or repatriation. Bereaved whānau could take their loved ones to their ancestral urupā, although still not to the marae first.

But they had to do that with a funeral director, which was a problem as I saw it. That meant an unnecessary expense for the whānau who could easily do it themselves without having to pay for one of our staff to go with them. A lot of these journeys aren't 20 minutes down the road but a seven-hour drive into the countryside.

The updated guidelines came out the day before level three began. That was too late. We had families asking questions that we couldn't answer. 'As soon as we know, I will inform you.'

Meanwhile, some families were willing to wait until level one to have a full tangihanga and we had their loved ones in our care. We had to leave them on their own overnight in our chapel, which Francis had started calling the departure lounge. Every morning, when we got to work, we did a mihi with them all, addressed them by their name, and had a waiata before we went about our normal day.

Different jobs faced different pressures thanks to the reality of Covid-19 and the restrictions it put on everyday life. With no shortage of things to write about, media were always on the lookout for the story that hadn't yet been told

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

Last week I got a lot of calls from media trying to work out what was happening with mental health. I think it was just our turn. But in a case like this, that is a massive question and not something that any one agency could answer. We knew from other major community events that it is the months following the event that are the hard ones. But it is hard to communicate this to a media person who wants to hear the here and now. It was pretty much all the media wanting to talk about deeply complex human experiences in a quick throwaway, and it doesn't work like that. So, then they move onto someone who

says what they want them to say.

For one person with mental health issues, lockdown and time for reflection prompted him to take some more control over his life, doing it in a very public way.

Sam Hardy

Mental health advocate

On Saturday 25 April, I publicly announced on my Facebook page that I had OCD. I recorded a video explaining and talking about it because it was almost 10 years since my diagnosis and I had decided to start advocating for OCD. It was a very full-on week for me. I was nervous about the video before it went live, but the response was really comforting. I got a lot of support from friends and family and people I didn't know. I think people were rooting for me. I am excited for what happens in the future regarding my advocacy work. I hope it brings about some change. And it felt better not hiding it anymore.

For a rural kura kaupapa, infrastructure that may have been adequate before was not going to be sufficient for a post-Covid world when school began again.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

Our school started in 2002, but we were behind the times a bit. We didn't have all the tech gear we needed at all. We are at a new location since late last year and when they put us in here, we had no internet. We've had to do a lot of pushing and shoving to get the internet we need.

We had all the devices, smart TVs and so on, but not the internet connection. We were able to release devices to senior students to use at home, but the problem in our area is that a lot of the homes don't have an internet hook-up. That was an interesting problem to deal with over the course of lockdown.

The Ministry supplied us with great resources. We had packs of work for our children to do but they were based on Google Classroom, which was a new way of learning for us. And if they didn't have internet at home, we had one person reconfiguring the work as hard

copy and dropping it off at homes. It was probably twice as hard as teaching, to be honest.

Some schools were able to reopen at the earliest opportunity – even if that meant students would return but their regular teachers wouldn't, and the classroom environment was anything but normal.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury

Primary school teacher

I got called on the last Friday of level four and asked to go back to teach on the following Tuesday, which was the first day of level three. That would change things a bit for the better as I think we had probably hit our peak of being able to find things to do at home.

The work was two days a week for two weeks at a school where I did some relieving last year. The teachers weren't going back yet but about 60 of the kids said they would come back at level three. It was a bit odd as the regular teachers would still be at home. Those of us in the classroom would supervise the kids doing the online learning that the teachers at home were setting. We would have a bubble there.

Most of my colleagues teach young primary school pupils. The overall aim of the online learning in lockdown had been to make it engaging for the kids and not make it too academic. It's hard to set academic learning if you don't know about the level of support at home. That's why there was lots of project-based stuff.

The teachers at home seem to have liked the work. Lots had their own kids, so they were enjoying having time with them. They were teaching their own classes online and helping their own kids in real life.

Small businesses carried on as best they could, conducting such everyday commerce as came their way and taking the downtime to imagine what the future might be like.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

Every day there were a few deliveries to send out. Our web orders continued to have a bit of an upswing and it will be interesting to see

if that improvement continues once it goes to level three.

We also started doing some local deliveries for one of the local cafés, working together with the local farmers' market, as that is permitted. Mostly I deposited a parcel on a doorstep, banged on the door and stepped back. It seemed to be quite popular. One woman was very effusive. 'I thank you for being out here doing this,' she said. 'You are a hero.' It was very humbling.

We realised we will have to operate differently after this, though I'm not sure how. We did realise a few other things. I had always said we were vulnerable because we didn't have a supermarket product. We were dependent on the hospitality industry, which had to be healthy or we wouldn't be. And, in this case, it was one of the hardest hit. It's something my partner Rebekah and I contemplated as we wandered around the supermarkets, gnashing our teeth at the sight of similar products made by our competitors and knowing they were enjoying that cushion.

So, part of our future thinking would be diversification. I wasn't sure what, I just knew we would still be Hakanoa and be small.

Attempts to lead a normal life were being carried on in a context of increasing confidence about efforts to beat Covid-19 in New Zealand. However, there were still many questions about the virus and its progress to be answered.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

It felt like it was maybe two steps forward, one back this week. I didn't see any official reports but there were stories from New York that young people with the virus were having strokes. It was possible that the consequences of infection were more wide reaching than people understood. This was entirely predictable. In fact, it was why myself and others didn't think it appropriate to let a virus we knew nothing about run through a population – because there could be all sorts of impacts.

I spent a lot of time talking to old colleagues about how much we still didn't understand. There were still lots of countries where it hadn't taken off. There must be something else going on there. It wasn't about isolation. It was potentially about immune systems. There could be useful information around that. It could be about countries with high burdens of intestinal worms. There could be all sorts of things impacting on immune systems and making them less

vulnerable.

There have also been some very bad studies published. One tried to get a handle on how many people had already been infected in the US by looking at antibody levels, using tests that didn't work well and biased ways of getting people to sign up to have the tests, and publishing it as though it was good data so that people said, 'Oh, it looks like half the population have had the virus already.' I saw people saying, 'What did it mean for New Zealand?' It meant zip for New Zealand. It was very frustrating.

You had to wade through so much shit on the subject. I was asked this week to respond to an open letter to the PM that said our response had been a gross over-reaction, Covid was only the flu, and so on. I could hardly bring myself to do it, but I had to spend my time debunking this because some people might believe it. This is the problem with social media – if you find shit, you're more likely to be fed more shit.

While scientists and epidemiologists coped with the medical consequences of Covid, and as restrictions started to be loosened, there was an increasing need for help at the social level.

Sam Johnson

Student Volunteer Army

It was a week of Zoom meetings. There is something strange about being in the same place all the time and having the meetings change around you. I had a lot of calls with iwi groups this week and really got a lot out of the karakia they did at the start of those meetings. It inspired me to introduce that to our team in order to change the pace of things a bit. It came up early in the week. I wanted everyone to change pace. We needed to make things feel normal even while we were working so hard on new things and rolling out our system to more stores and expanding what we do. We added about 200 products this week, taking the number up to 1000, which is a good range.

The overseas experience significantly informed the New Zealand response to the pandemic in several ways. Many people had friends and family in other countries who were more seriously affected than they were here.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

Most of my family are overseas because I was born in England. I have an uncle who is just two years older than me and to whom I am very close. His wife's mother was in a dementia ward and now she has the coronavirus. It's terrible.

I followed the international data but there were a couple of things bugging me about the way it was brought to us. There is a feeling of gloating that I dislike. This was not a competition. It's all right saying well done keep it up, but comparisons are odious. And I noticed on Twitter this week a few ads from Labour congratulating New Zealand and I thought don't you dare try to politicise this. This would have been the responsibility of whoever was in government.

Technology came into its own keeping people together and helping to allay fears about loved ones.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

Most of my immediate family are in England and I am very close to them – I usually meet them twice a year. It had been a little bit sad thinking I wouldn't see them for a while with travel on hold for who knows how long. We talked every day and I kept them updated on what has been going on. They were lucky to be living in the country in small bubbles, so they didn't see the carnage that was occurring in London. They love cooking too so we discussed that and new cocktails.

Overseas family members had even more worrying experiences to share.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury

Primary school teacher

Max's parents in Germany live in one half of a house with the other half rented out, and their tenants have the virus. For them it is really close to home. Usually they would share an entrance way, so they have been using a separate entrance and they are fine, but one of the tenants went into hospital last week. Max's dad's best friend has also

been hospitalised. His parents are a bit older than mine, which makes them more at risk.

Many noted the difference between reactions in other countries, where citizens confronted graphic reminders of Covid daily, and New Zealand, where most people didn't even know someone who had the virus.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

I do business in the UK and US and have been in regular contact with a lot of people there. Those two countries are obviously very different but also similar. Everyone seemed to be sitting at home on Zoom calls with a weird background and doing the best they could. People internationally have been well aware of the implications of the virus on a much greater human level than we have. We genuinely think that it will go back to business as usual because it is 'an old persons' disease'. And it's not. That was one of the reasons I felt compelled to share my own Covid experience on social media.

For those with close family in other countries, the combination of remoteness and a steady stream of bad news was particularly difficult.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

My family in the UK have all been okay. I've been having lots of contact with friends overseas because it was my birthday week.

My dad had a whole bunch of non-Covid hospital appointments, and my mum is very vulnerable – she has an underlying health condition – so every time he goes to hospital, he has to self-isolate for two weeks in the same house. They have been seeing each other and waving, but they haven't *seen* each other for three weeks, and the other day he got another appointment. It seems every time he gets to the end of his two weeks of self-isolation, the hospital calls to give him another appointment.

There has also been lots of media interest from overseas lately. I spoke to the BBC and CNN a week ago and from those appearances a

bunch of other media contacted me. ‘Why is New Zealand behaving this way? Is it because your PM is a woman?’ I get that a lot.

Everybody I have talked to was jealous because they were mostly calling from countries where they were very concerned and worried about the virus. I’ve had really mixed feelings, because I can see what they can see, and yet we have people here who are saying we over-reacted and need to get back to normal straight away. And I know what will happen if we do – the cases will come back.

For those reliant on it to support their local economies, the thought that tourism might not recover was too awful to contemplate. But while continuing the search for alternative industries, efforts were also being put into salvaging whatever tourist dollars would be available.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

We realised Queenstown and the district were going to be dependent on the domestic tourism market for a period. I learnt last week that Kiwis spent \$5 billion on overseas trips last year. How could we get a portion of that? We were working with operators and Air New Zealand on planning for getting domestic services back into Queenstown and with operators and hoteliers and motels to put together attractive packages.

The groups I’m working with around recovery fall into two streams. The first is about putting a meal on the table. What can we do in the short term? How do we get domestic visitors? How do we get a trans-Tasman travel bubble up and running? The other group is about the longer terms effects and how to protect ourselves more from the vagaries of tourism.

I had a discussion lined up with some tech outfits from the US. An operation based here might be very attractive to their younger employees. There might be opportunities in medical tourism – high net-worth individuals have these pieces of work done. They could base themselves here before and after. Recovery in a Covid-free environment could be appealing.

While some had their sights set firmly on the future and were working hard to find one that worked, others had been shielded

from reality by the likes of the wage subsidy.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

Lockdown created a cocoon effect and it won't be until it is lifted that we will know where things are at. My sense has been that it is a lot worse than people thought. I predicted there would be a massive number of jobs lost.

I heard cautious optimism from a couple of clients, based on expectation rather than reality. They thought that at level three customers would go back to work and start using them.

Farmers were okay because they could carry on doing what they do. But prices dropped, so agriculture was not going to be the big saviour some people expected.

For those who didn't lose their jobs, it could turn out to be a good thing. A few people I spoke to had got worked up about the lockdown, but I recommended they treat it as an opportunity. When had they ever had the chance to just sit and think about things without the pressure of knowing they should be doing something else?

One client made this a hugely productive time. He initiated daily Skype meetings with staff and examined his entire business process – what works, what didn't work, how work could be more streamlined – and he reworked his whole business model. He was probably the exception rather than the rule.

Netflix and *Tiger King* got a lot of attention, but old-fashioned boredom busters also came to the fore. Consumers were doing a lot of experimenting in the kitchen – sometimes by accident.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

My partner put onion salt in a shop before we closed down. I said I don't use that crap. But I did – and it was so delicious. I still haven't been able to buy flour, but I'm lucky because I can get through the restaurant supplies. I've also been working my way through my wine stash. That's been an entertainment option. But I'm running out of things to do. I've done as much as I can in the garden, and the house is as clean as it's ever going to be.

The more stressful the work life, the more that simple pleasures seemed to be the best option for anyone wanting to switch off in lockdown.

Sam Johnson

Student Volunteer Army

We were lucky. We had a garden at my place that felt like being back on the farm where I grew up. There was nowhere to go, really, so we tended to stay home. I spent one of my nicest weekends just tidying things – sorting out the garage, hanging up pictures that had sat on the floor in the hallway for two years.

Despite the best efforts of everyone, domestic harmony between people who had never spent so much time together was not always easy to maintain.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

The extra week at level four – actually the sixth week of lockdown for us early adopters – was one of the more challenging ones on the work and kids front. As a father, I began to doubt my parenting abilities. It turned out, over the course of the lockdown, that the kids didn't know how to do quite a lot of things by themselves. Everyone is meant to be 'resilient' these days. Parents are meant to grow resilient children, who will be resilient adults and take on the world, but ours were so reliant on us.

I knew that in the overall scheme of things, we would look back at this and say, 'Thank Christ, it's over,' and, even at its worst, I knew it wasn't going to destroy my marriage, our relationship or the household. Not like the hideous stuff I was hearing from people who were about to split up and got caught out by lockdown and had to stay in the house with the partner they hated.

Lockdown might have pushed some people apart but given the time to reflect on rifts and recriminations gone by, others found and took an opportunity for reconciliation.

Sam Hardy

I decided to contact my dad for the first time in a couple of years. It felt right. There was stuff going on. His partner was unwell, and I wanted to give some support. We had fallen out at the beginning of 2018. It had always been an interesting relationship, but at that time we had a disagreement about money that led to us not talking to each other. I had tried to get back in touch with him about a year ago and he wasn't interested. Some months later, he tried to get back in touch with me and I felt ready to re-establish contact. I said I was ready to talk if he was. He made it clear he wasn't happy with how things had gone and wanted to fix it. We have only texted so far, and we haven't talked about what happened, but we plan to speak soon. He lives in Nelson, so fortunately there will be no pressure to get together.

With young children in the house, school meant parents as teachers, a role adopted with varying degrees of enthusiasm. And birthday parties still had to be organised.

Sido Kitchin

Magazine editor

I've been trying to keep myself preoccupied by keeping Darcy occupied. School had given us a chocka timetable we could do, and an alternative one with a few have-tos. And you could mix and match. We went for the populated timetable first. I said, 'Why don't we start early and knock off some of the afternoon things this morning? Then we'll have the afternoon free.'

Before long I had a splitting headache. I said, 'Tomorrow we'll take it a little bit easier.'

His sister Cleo was different, being completely independent. She had some time off last week, then she got told her exams were getting brought forward for some complicated reasons involving when they could be back. Kids learn in different ways, and even though Cleo's been diligent, she benefits from real classrooms and discussion, so I think it's been a bit tough for her.

Cleo had her seventeenth birthday this week in lockdown, with very minimal presents. I thought I'd try to do my online shopping locally and ordered her a pair of earrings from Nick Von K.

I'm not a big online shopper and wasn't sure they would even get to me by the day, but they were in the letterbox in 15 minutes with a lovely note from Nick. Turns out he lives just round the corner.

Cleo got all spruced up and had a Zoom party with mates from two

o'clock. I heard her father saying, 'It's your birthday, I want you to spend more time with us.' And I thought, 'We've been in lockdown. We're the only people she's been seeing.'

Anzac Day

With no provision for large gatherings, the traditional dawn service and other Anzac Day events were not possible on 25 April at Alert Level 4. It was the first time since 1915 that the RSA had cancelled the event. Those wishing to acknowledge the day were encouraged to Stand at Dawn at the end of their driveways – or on their apartment balconies, or at their farm gates – and observe the traditional minute's silence at 6am. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, her partner Clarke Gayford, and her father Ross Ardern did so at Premier House in Wellington. Around the rest of the country others followed suit. Everyone marked this most unique of Anzac Days in their own way – or nearly everyone.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

I wanted to take a wreath to the Memorial Gates and was told by police when I checked with them that I couldn't do that. Their message was: if you do it somewhere public you will attract people. But my father fought in World War II and so did my uncles, and my grandfather in World War I, as did my wife's grandfather – so I do feel some inbuilt requirement to do something. Then I thought we would walk to Lake Hayes Pavilion, which is about 300 metres from our house, but I couldn't do that, either. So, at 6am my wife and daughter and I got out of bed and took our wreath out to our gate and laid it there.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury

Primary school teacher

Anzac Day has never been a big thing for our family. Maybe it stems from our Irish heritage.

Chris Farrelly

CEO Auckland City Mission

I went out with my flatties and stood on the street for a moment's silence and then went back to bed. There were a few people out in Mt Eden doing the same thing. Just a sprinkling.

Sam Johnson

Student Volunteer Army

We went for a walk to the Bridge of Remembrance near where we live and looked around and laid a poppy. There was nothing open, but there were a lot of people around, including a lot on their bikes. It was quite nice to see.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

My family was not directly in any war zones, but I stood up and had my own little quiet moment. The people in my apartment complex might have been on their balconies at 6am, but I wouldn't have been there to see it because I was asleep.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

I was disappointed there would be no Anzac Day flyover. We tried to talk about Anzac Day on Kerre's show, but the listeners weren't terribly keen.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

Where I am located at Ōrere Point is not far from Ōrere School, which has a flagpole, and every Anzac Day there is normally a service there. I didn't go and stand at the top of our driveway at 6am because I only found out about that at 7am. But I walked up to the school. There was no one there, but someone had laid a little wreath. I stood at the flagpole and paid my respects.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

We had liaised with the RSA to get poppies into My Food Bag boxes – My Food Bag donated for that. Unfortunately, logistics in level four were against us. We didn't get up and stand down at the farm gate, but we acknowledged it among

ourselves with stories and the Last Post, and Māori Television always broadcasts wonderful documentaries on Anzac Day.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

Anzac Day was Saturday and we were closed until 1pm. There was some discussion about changing it because of the demand, but I thought it was an important day and everyone could live with a store being closed for six hours – our teams and customers needed the breather.

In my weekly note to our whole team, I reminded them we were in a fight, so it was important to remember the people who fought for us. A lot of our stores were collecting for the RSA – they have missed their massive collection moments this year. One of our stores supports two branches, and the manager told me that the money they collected this year was being used for food parcels for veterans having an economic struggle.

The dawn standing at the gate at home was actually one of the most impactful Anzac Days I have had.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

I do go to the services every year, and this year I participated in the Stand at Dawn ceremonies. We live on a very Wellington street, where the houses are up the hill and down the hill. A good number of our neighbours came out. One across the road is an army officer. We stood in the half-light with me blasting Radio New Zealand out of my phone. It was exactly the right moment for our time. It captured something about the way we are living in this crazy time that matched the growing connection to Anzac Day. Also, it was one of the first times I had really stopped to do something else since Covid began.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

We woke up and got to the end of the driveway. I was really moved by the number of neighbours outside their properties at their letterboxes and some with kids there. The neighbour who lives right next to us played the Last Post on his trumpet. It sounded beautiful and you could see everyone was moved. We tuned into the live feed on Radio New

Zealand then went back inside and watched some documentaries on the Anzacs.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

We didn't get up at six o'clock. That doesn't do it for me, and we've never done it any other year. But we had Anzac biscuits and talked to our daughters about Annabelle's great-great-uncle, who was charged with sedition when he fell asleep on night duty and ended up getting killed in battle.

CHAPTER 9

Alert Level 3: week one

28 APRIL–4 MAY

Total cases to date: 1124

Total active cases: 216

Total deaths: 19

**Total tests conducted:
128,703**

28 April

Queues form at fast-food drive-through lanes in the early hours as New Zealand moves into Alert Level 3.

The Ministry of Health says a tracing app will be available in a fortnight.

29 April

The United States reaches a total of 1 million cases of Covid-19, the most in the world.

30 April

Revenue Minister Stuart Nash says the Covid-19 Response (Taxation and other Regulatory Urgent Measures) Bill gives businesses more than \$3 billion in tax refunds as they deal with the economic impact of the virus.

1 May

The government will provide interest-free loans for a year to small businesses affected by Covid-19 to help with cashflow needs.

The Court of Appeal rejects an attempt to sue the Prime Minister, the Director-General of Health and the Director of Civil Defence Emergency Management over the legality of the lockdown.

3 May

The government announces fast tracking of consents under the Resource Management Act to get new projects moving.

4 May

No new cases are recorded for the first time since 16 March.

The number of active cases falls below 200.

The High Court rules a man can leave quarantine to visit his dying father.

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For nearly five weeks New Zealand stayed home to stop the transmission of Covid-19, and as it went to Alert Level 3 the country had taken on a bleak air, with near-empty roads and shopping centres giving mute witness to that determination and to dogged exercisers pounding out their daily permitted allowance.

A move to level three, bringing with it the prospect of relief from these stringent restrictions, had naturally been eagerly anticipated. To the disappointment of many, it didn't change much.

'Under Alert Level 3 we must continue to stay in our household bubbles whenever we are not at work, school, buying the groceries or exercising,' said the government guidelines.

People could expand their bubbles to take in close family or provide support for isolated people, but social life was not much improved. Nor were travel restrictions relaxed to any great extent. People who had been in the wrong place at the wrong time at lockdown could move through the country to get home – but only once and in one direction.

Drive-through takeaways and coffee for pick-up were sanctioned.

Most controversially, no more than 10 people were permitted to attend gatherings such as weddings, church services and tangihanga. It had been widely expected that the number would be higher.

Those who shared responsibility for the lockdown were as relieved to go down a level as anyone else.

Grant Robertson

People had been under a lot of stress. They had had a lot going on in their lives. And, even with a tiny bit of hindsight, I think a lot of people felt we would be in level four a lot longer than we were. We were staring down the barrel of what we saw overseas and saying it would hit us hard for a long time, but we had been successful in squashing that curve and breaking the chain. But people may not have thought that far ahead. We could see that behaviour in the wage subsidy scheme – people took it because they thought there would be zero business, and, in some cases, it wasn't zero, which was good.

I took advantage of being at level three to pick up some click-and-collect takeaways. And there were good signs around. I was out on Lambton Quay at lunchtime. The barber next door to the café where I was going was cleaning up, getting ready to reopen and he gave me a thumbs up.

With travel restrictions relaxed, people were keen to reconnect with family.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

My bubble actually got smaller because Kerry went back to town to be with the grandchildren. That pull was too strong for her. I couldn't do that because I had to work pretty consistently and stay focused. Working from home with the grandkids would have been impossible. I'd be out on the deck playing trucks.

I thought level three was still a pretty dangerous place, as the Prime Minister kept reminding us. I had a lot of concern for our union's members and making sure there were real good safety protocols in place because at the end of the day – literally at the end of the day, after work – they are going back to their families' bubbles having spent the day mixing with people from other bubbles.

Others just rejoiced to have the essential takeaways and coffee back on the menu.

Kaiora Tipene

Funeral director

We were excited there would be mocha at level three. We went straight out on the first day and got one. It wasn't quite what we were used to, but we still enjoyed it. Francis would have paid \$20 for it.

The next day I was in the middle of arranging a funeral when my son Mihaka rang me. I ignored it but he kept ringing, so in the end I had to say, 'Sorry, this must be important' and take the call.

'I'm with a family. What's the problem?'

'Mum, please can I please have McDonald's?'

'Oh my gosh! I'm with a family!'

'I know I know but I see it on Facebook.'

'What are you doing on Facebook?'

'My brother showed me.'

'Text me through your order and I will get it on Uber.'

Then when they got it, they put it on Instagram and my sister tagged me. I thought, 'Could you not?'

It was possible to turn buying takeaways into a socially conscious act of good citizenship.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

The big thing in the lead-up to level three seemed to be working out what your first takeaway would be. I did not, even though cooking had become tedious. Then part of me thought we should be supporting local businesses because they had had four weeks of nothing. So, I wandered up to Ponsonby Road. It was depressing. There was zero control of people milling around outside the cafés while I got my coffee and lamington. The only exception was SPQR, which had perfectly taped out areas with that police masking tape. Uber pick-up in one line; people pick-up in another.

We realised level three wouldn't change anything. Annabelle and I were still getting frustrated with each other. The kids were still home all the time. We were still working at home.

It might have been over-excitement, or it might have been the new normal, but everyday activities were suddenly stressful.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

I broke out of my bubble on Friday night, which was the second day of level three, and got takeaways to pick up from Paradise. I ordered online at midday for 5.30 collection. It was total chaos. They had set up four collection points but were still far behind.

There was one guy screaming through his mask at the girl working there, shaking his fist in the air: 'I've been waiting an hour for this!'

She was cowering. I intervened. The whole thing was a shambles with a lot of people standing around close to each other. It's normally a pretty efficient operation but not this time.

But there was good news for those who wanted their coffee sustainable.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury

Primary school teacher

There was an article on *Stuff* saying the Ministry of Health had approved the use of Keep Cups, so we went to get a coffee, but the first place we went to told us no one was doing that at level three. We told them it had been approved but they didn't believe us so we kept looking until we found a place that would use our cups. And we were able to get work going again on our tiny house. We lined up a plumber, gasfitter and electrician for the work we couldn't do ourselves. Level three has meant a lot of changes to our bubble though. It was already big with eight people but now four of them are working outside the home.

With most social activity having been on hold, the boundaries of Alert Level 3 came under a lot of pressure.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

I have a group of mates outside work I try to catch up with on Fridays. They are mostly small business guys. [We were on a Zoom call and] one said, 'Jacinda said ten people could get together. Let's go to Chris's place.' Well, yes, but that was for funerals. I realised I had to say no because I couldn't have a 'David Clark moment' where I was called out for not demonstrating leadership of the rules. Fortunately, one of the others spoke up and said it wasn't permitted yet and that I

couldn't run the risk of lots of cars outside my house.

There was even time to think about non-Covid matters.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

This week we had our first two hours of non-Covid talk on the show. We were so excited to talk about the cannabis reform referendum. Who would have thought we could ever be so excited about that? We had great calls and good interviews. We tried to talk about Pharmac saying they now couldn't afford to fund Keytruda, the breast cancer drug. That worked for a wee bit. Then it was on to funerals and dying people. Callers still wanted to talk about Covid issues, but it felt like they were getting a little bit weary of it. They wanted some upbeat talk. They didn't want to be depressed. Everyone loved a story about a lady whose husband died and her husband's chook came to comfort her.

Formerly deserted areas started to show signs of life as people emerged from their strict lockdown.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

I got reports from people saying cafés were open for takeaways and coffee. Folk were milling around in the streets enjoying the Queenstown sunshine. There was a call from a lady in Arrowtown saying there was an Asian tour group there. They must have been under lockdown somewhere.

Tasks that had been put on hold were suddenly back on the agenda.

Sido Kitchin

Magazine editor

We were finally allowed to go back to the magazine office to get our stuff after Bauer had closed its doors. They let in a few people at a

time to maintain social distancing. I was very trembly lipped about the whole thing as I drove in, and I always used to love driving to work. Once I was in there with my boxes, I put on my bravest face. I had to pack up nine years' worth of *Woman's Day* stuff and another five years' worth of *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*. The only other person in our area was Pamela Stirling, the editor of the *Listener*, cleaning up hers. I was pleased she was there.

It was hard to know what to take. There were the kids' pictures done when they could only just draw, the little photo booth pix with staff at dos, the thesaurus that Wendyl Nissen gave me with a lovely note when I first became a magazine editor. I found a thing called The Quote Book where we would write down the most ridiculous office banter, most of it incredibly rude. Bags were being searched on exit but the only valuable thing leaving the building was people's talent.

Normally clear communication from authorities throughout the Covid-19 crisis seemed to have failed when it came to changing levels.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

It was really clear lots of people didn't understand what level three was. It really was lockdown, but because it wasn't being referred to as such, they weren't doing it. Also, I didn't realise that people who you didn't know on Skype could now Skype you. I was getting ready for a meeting and Skype started so I turned it on. It thought it was the meeting, but it was a random member of the public who was really worried because her brother was going off and doing stuff and seeing friends, so I had to explain level three to her.

Whether they understood them or not, many people struggled with the rules for funerals.

Kaiora Tipene

Funeral director

There were a couple of complications with high-profile names and cases when the police were lenient on some families, letting them go home when others couldn't. New Zealand is so small that other people

found out and wanted to know why those people were allowed to come home.

There were lots of bodies still waiting here to have their tangi. Some people just gave up. They got tired of waiting and collected their loved ones without the ceremonies they had wanted.

As it got colder, business picked up a little bit. For the first two weeks of lockdown, it was fairly quiet – about five a week. In the last week of level four, we did 17 funerals.

The fact of a level three presupposed the existence of a level two, and questions were soon being asked about when the move to that level would be made and what it would look like.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

We have asked the government to allow domestic travel as much as possible under Alert Level 2 – by air and coach, in rental cars and the like. That is the only way we will get some activity in Queenstown before level one.

We have a lovely restaurant and winery called Akarua about a kilometre from home. It's our standard place to go on Sunday morning for breakfast. I went there for a takeaway coffee this week. 'I can't wait till I can come back for breakfast,' I told the woman running it.

She looked at me with tears running down her cheeks and said, 'We can't wait for you to come back either.'

With a return to normal life on the horizon – albeit a distant one – thoughts naturally turned to the future of work and whether there would actually be any.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

This week we had International Workers Commemoration Day on 28 April – it's an international day that honours people who get killed at work. We sent messages of solidarity to unions overseas whose members have been dying because they were working to help Covid people. It brings it home to you how lucky we have been.

The first week of level three has been hectic because, while quite a

few of our members were essential workers under lockdown, most weren't, so they have just gone back to work.

It continued to be a struggle the whole way through to make sure they had the right volumes of PPE in the right place at the right time. We have had to advocate quite strongly over that.

Add to that the restrictions around physical distancing and hygiene control to maintain everyone's safety and it's a lot of work for a union to do.

There has been a lot of low-level bad behaviour by employers. I'm not damning all of them, but some haven't been as conscientious as we would have liked. New Zealand is characterised by a large number of small workplaces. The small and medium-sized enterprises sector is under the gun – they want to get people back to work, but they don't have an HR department and they don't know how to incorporate an employee health and safety representative into their company structure.

There have also been issues about people having had annual leave deducted to supplement their wages when they haven't agreed to it. That's not permitted. It might be chicanery, it might be basic ignorance, but you can't just tell an employee you are taking their holiday pay off them.

We have also launched our Rebuild Better campaign, which is starting to frame what the principles around a rebuild should look like from our point of view. We are opposed to austerity policies. We believe that maintaining wages and the value of wages is good for the economy.

Some indicators of what a post-Covid work life might be like started to appear.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

At level two, we will be going back to the office, but now I'm going to look towards probably three days a week there for everyone and two days from home. Working from home works, and if we get the communication just a bit tidier I think it might benefit everybody to do it a bit more. A couple of my staff have kids and it's always tricky arranging days around that. One uses Uber because she doesn't drive. There's also the benefit of staying out of the traffic. One lives at Huapai and can take over an hour to get to work. You want to keep the social aspect of being in the office, because everyone gets on, but

providing a bit more flexibility would save on petrol and improve emotional wellbeing.

For a kura kaupapa, Alert Level 3 was an ideal opportunity to prepare for a full return to school at the next level.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

We decided to make use of local people with different expertise. When school starts again, we will have a pōwhiri for our new kids. There are six or seven of them joining us, then shared kai and work in workshops where we put older kids with younger ones. We have lots of talented people who are keen to share their skills: one of our mums does Zumba, another does weaving, another one will come in and talk about the oral history of the place, one is a gardener, and so on.

This crisis has made us very aware of our environment and a lot of the teaching this term will focus on the environment and sustainability. Our topics of interest are kaitiakitanga – guardianship – and Hokiangatanga – what is unique about here – and then the Māori daily calendar. We will be looking at food and sustainability in a global sense, at shortages in the world and locally, and how can we look after what we have.

Adrenaline carried the population through the first urgent weeks of Covid, but sooner or later adrenaline has to be paid for.

Chris Farrelly

CEO Auckland City Mission

I have been hanging out for level two because then I might be able to get out of here and even go home up north for a while. All of us at the City Mission have been experiencing a new level of tiredness as we move into this new world, but the work still has to be done.

As a leader I've had to try to take a step back. Running strategy in crisis mode is okay at one level, but I didn't know if we would always want to do things this way.

True to their word, the government has been keen to move on getting people out of motels and into permanent accommodation. There has been a new style of working with government departments

– less complex and more flexible. Before, they would give us money but there would be small print, Ministry treacle-like bureaucracy, contracts that were complex and burdensome. That's all gone now. There has been a genuine will to move on things as quickly and simply as possible.

The homeless people we have been helping fall into two groups. One group has absolutely settled. They have seen this as a major change in their lives and are genuinely looking forward to something different.

The other group are incredibly unwell with addictions and don't necessarily want to change, and we have started to see the effects of that. We have had people evicted from motels in the past week. That hasn't surprised us. We know working with them will take a mammoth effort and require significant mental health support.

We have also been able to recommence our new building project in the past week. Hand in hand comes the big worry that we still have a lot of fundraising to do. We need \$110 million and there is still \$20 million to go. Our campaigns and fundraising approaches won't be relevant anymore and a lot of people who would have helped us won't be able to. That is a major concern and stress for us.

Interestingly, 35 people have joined the staff since lockdown because we had to expand so many services. We all work on different sites but gather once a week on Zoom. I can't believe we haven't done it before. In that short space of time we became united. We will keep this going after Covid.

Reflecting the general feeling of 'We're all in this together', lessons being learnt from Covid were being shared.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

I did a webinar with a bunch of retailers through Retail New Zealand. I told them what we had learnt at Foodstuffs, including the mistakes we made. A lot of those attending wanted a political view on who should have been able to stay open in lockdown. I refused to give one. I wasn't medically or scientifically qualified to argue about that strategy, but we did want every New Zealand company back in business as soon as possible. We enjoyed being in a competitive market before, we want that again.

I focused on lessons like checking in with people every day to see how they were doing. I talked a little bit about looking after yourself

as a leader so you can look after others.

We have also had issues with productivity. Now there is more manufacturing up and running, and demand has been very high, but with workers having to stand two metres apart and follow hygiene procedures and all the rest, productivity has been down.

And our customers have started to show their emotions over continued social distancing and so on in stores. We have people saying, 'Get out of the way. Just let me go and shop.'

Then there has been a rising number of zealots who have worked out my email address. One had been going to a store every second day, taking photos of people shopping in pairs and threatening to 'tell Jacinda'. She kept auditing the store. Another has strong opinions about online selling and how it should work. In their view, we have been breaking the rules and they have been kicking up a fuss.

We re-engineered our pizza offer with new tech so you can buy it on an oven-ready plate. You get your pizza at about the same speed as ordering from a pizza place but not so mass-produced. And we have begun serving coffee again but only opened our Lotto counters in Four Squares, not the supermarkets. We've been scratching our heads about that.

The feeling of fatigue was widespread, even as blows continued to fall.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

Business has been going on, but I just haven't felt as involved. It's been happening in an almost formulaic process. We lost the Uber account in an agency re-alignment we knew was coming. It's an American-owned service and they wanted one network to look after their account. We get used to this in our industry.

Employers noticed that their staff were working above and beyond the call of duty.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

When the workload picked up and we had 17 funerals in a week, it

was a great test. I found a lot of staff had been working on after clocking out.

‘Why are you doing that?’

‘Well we all want to stay in work.’

I was so taken aback. Vanessa and Stephanie came in on days off to help. It’s been very overwhelming. Whatever we have been going through it has shown there is so much good in this world. I thought if I won Lotto, I’d buy each of the staff a house because they had worked so hard. Prior to the virus, if I won Lotto, I wasn’t going to buy anyone a house. I was going to buy a funeral home and have cheap funerals for everyone.

People with the weight of their communities on their shoulders could run from the pressure they were under, but they couldn’t hide.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

I cleared my inbox on Friday and took most of the long weekend off. On Monday, I turned on the computer and there were 87 emails from the weekend. That took up a whole day. They were primarily a mixture of people calling out for help – ‘I’ve lost my job and have no way of paying my rent’ – folk who were just worried about what was going to happen to them and their families, and the remainder from people with ideas for solutions, some wouldn’t fly but there were some good ones.

Unsurprisingly, rumours had bred in lockdown, including one that suicide numbers had risen sharply.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

I had a number of media call me at the Mental Health Foundation with similar stories about suicides: ‘I hear that . . .’, ‘. . . a cop told me . . .’ It felt like it needed a response once and for all. I spent a lot of time saying the only person who can confirm this is the chief coroner, so don’t believe your sources, even if they are the local cop or mental health worker. The Office of Suicide Prevention and the

police also came out to say it was wrong and pointed out the dangers of such a rumour.

Behind the scenes, work was under way on a Budget that would be like no other.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

Science advisors feed into the Budget process – we provide support for ministers to make sure decisions are based on evidence and this included some advice about urgent spending. Obviously, there were lots of great ideas to quickly fix things, but we asked for advice to make sure they also set us up for recovery.

The Budget is an opportunity to make a difference more widely than the crisis. Science advisors look at the bigger picture to imagine a recovered future that was better than the past. That was the challenge this week and a group of us got together with Treasury to advise.

You can't just dial up a scenario, but it has been interesting to think about the crisis as having shone a bright light on problems we have, such as inequities and social differences between the Māori community and other communities. Covid-19 hasn't just affected us in terms of things like pilots losing their jobs, it's also been an extra strain on a system that is already strained. We wanted to see if we could support a recovery to lift up lots of people.

At the same time, developments overseas continued to move at pace. There's a new study saying maybe it's this, another saying maybe it's that. It's been a challenge to keep up with it and work out which of the many new ideas are going to stick.

There has been a lot of movement on developing a vaccine. A couple have gone into trial and we have tried to work out what that means in terms of the timeline. We want to make sure New Zealand is part of the solution without backing the wrong horse. There are lots of decisions to be made around vaccines and drugs.

If there was ever a disease that needed global co-operation this is it. We've never had a disease where we have learnt so much so quickly as it is happening. That's totally a good thing because it gives us a big chance to get it right.

Work on a vaccine is going faster than it's ever gone but it is still a long process. The talk of an 18-month timeframe to have one available includes that speeding up. And you have to balance speed against risk – what takes the time is giving it to people in clinical trials and seeing

what happens. If you sped that up too much, you would run the risk of giving people a vaccine with bad side effects. A vaccine available globally in a year would be a miracle.

We have also been dealing with reports of strokes and other side effects of Covid being discovered. They are real. Small parts of the population are getting these, but with such high caseloads, these rare impacts are becoming visible.

It's been frustrating to hear people start questioning the science and saying we've over-reacted. These have often been the same people who wanted a lockdown in the first place. They say the models we used were only scenarios that raised alarm. Well, we will never know what would have happened here if we had done things differently, but we can look overseas and see what happened there. Our empty hospitals are a really good result.

A huge number of helpful people have been emailing me with advice, some extraordinarily useful and some not so useful. Among the useful ones this week and completely randomly, late on Saturday I got contacted by the head of a biotech company who has been stranded in New Zealand. He has some really useful input about how to put together a vaccine platform, useful for the discussion about how we contribute to vaccine research and get access to a vaccine if and when there is one. I put him onto the right people, and they rang back and said that was great.

Preparing their business for post-Covid realities, owners had to make tough decisions.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

The big question is how busy we will be at level two. Obviously, people will be excited about being able to go to restaurants again, but you wonder how they will be after a few weeks, when the reality of the economy kicks in. I've been going through staff and looking at how many people we will need. I had to start at the top of the food chain and sort out letting people go. At that level and after many years, people have become friends. They were pretty emotional chats.

Our landlord for Woodpecker Hill in Parnell has been amazing and come to the party. He has given us a good nine months of well reduced rent to get us out of the ground. If we hadn't been able to get help on the rent, there was no point carrying on.

Parnell is hard – it doesn't have Ponsonby's foot traffic. People

won't be throwing down \$500 on a dinner. If four people can get out for a hundred bucks, it will be something they can do every now and then. I don't want to be a special occasion birthday restaurant where you see your customers once a year. So, we have planned on fewer people and looked at price and doing smaller dishes for under \$20. People will be able to get in and out and have a beer and a bowl of noodles and not break the bank. We're casualising it, and when we reopen it will be a new Woodpecker Hill.

Banks were a natural place to turn to for help, especially for longtime customers.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

We have been with our bank all of the company's 10 years. We haven't had an overdraft. My partner sold her house, which had been used for collateral before when we took small loans.

When this unfolded, we looked at who we owed money to and what we needed to keep going. We came up with a figure of \$50,000 and approached our bank, who immediately said that would be difficult because, for a start, we would have to give them an awful lot of information, which seemed strange given they had all our trading records for 10 years.

But while that was going on, Grant Robertson announced the new business loan scheme, which meant the bank would be exposed to just 20 per cent of the \$50,000 and the government would guarantee the rest. It looked like a slam dunk, so we rang the bank and said we'd go for it.

The person hadn't heard of the loan scheme. Then she said we wouldn't qualify for it because our turnover was too low. Then she found a couple of other obstacles when we pointed out our healthy turnover. We said we were still prepared to go ahead, and she finally came back with a long list of things we had to provide. It went on and on. They never at any point said no. At this point, they still haven't said anything. We didn't mention that we had started looking for another bank.

On a brighter note, online orders had gone up dramatically to the point where we were sending away a slightly groaning courier van every couple of days. And every day a couple of existing customers came back online with their orders.

School was offline and non-virtual classrooms were open for those whose parents had to work at Alert Level 3 and did not have childcare.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury

Primary school teacher

Being back in a classroom was a bit boring, because there were only about 10 kids in a bubble, and they were all working with an at-home learning programme anyway. That was so the whole class was doing the same work whether they were at home or at school. I was just there to supervise and help if anyone needed it. They knew more than I did about what they were doing.

On the first day, they were very quiet and quite nervous about all the protocols. They had to sit at separate desks. They couldn't touch things on other desks. They could play outside and talk but couldn't play tag or share a ball. They had to stay very isolated and I think they may have been more bored there than they would have been at home.

They weren't there because they wanted to be there but because their parents had to work. A lot of them had parents who were doctors or nurses, so they had had some sort of involvement with Covid at that level.

As a reliever, your income is always uncertain. I had accepted the days at this school before the Ministry announced it was continuing emergency payments for relievers. They had stopped when level four was supposed to stop, so there had been a week and a half when relievers didn't get paid. The extension actually meant I could have been sitting at home for the same money, but I liked being back in the classroom.

For anyone prone to anxiety, complications from Covid could make a stressful job even more stressful.

Sam Hardy

Mental health advocate

I take calls for an organisation, which can be pretty stressful work because the clients tend to be impatient people, and with Covid I have had to give them bad news, which they took out on me. On Tuesday last week I broke down after a couple of hours and couldn't do it

anymore. I've taken two weeks off.

The strain of keeping up with Covid was showing up in more and more people.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

It was a very up and down week. I had some days of feeling depressed and down and then some days of feeling okay. The online trolls and the emails get a bit much sometimes.

It was exciting to have a day with no new cases of Covid. It didn't mean we were out of the woods, but it was a milestone. I tweeted: 'Yay no cases but don't go out and celebrate by breaking all the rules.'

Within half an hour there was a bunch of trolling about the fact I had said that. It's like people just wait for my tweets, and it's hard. Then I get cross with myself for finding it hard.

Most people are fine. In general, they get it. But there are those who have always disagreed or are doing it for political points. So, the plan B people, who said we don't need such a strict lockdown, were still getting media time saying they are being censored. You can't claim you are being censored if you're saying it on the six o'clock news.

I did a lot of overseas news media this week because we are considered a success. I tried to make it clear we are not a success story yet but are on our way. There has been a mix of knowing we are near the finishing line but also worrying we will screw it up.

I've had a few nights of terrible sleep because of being slightly anxious. But then I've had days where I've felt we can do this!

I did some work with Toby Morris, which always makes me feel great. And I felt great when I got an email from a US scientist yesterday who has been working with the Indiana State Department. She got in touch to say she was using our graphics to help them understand what she was talking about.

The world would be changing, and consumer habits would be changing with it. To the far-seeing would go the spoils.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

We did a massive pitch for a premium account this week. It was a quantum leap away from where it would have been three months ago. Back then, for those luxury brands, you invested in flashy, expensive, activations and installations that everyone Instagrams and are very sparkly. Now we had to read the room or get kicked out.

It was estimated 43 per cent of New Zealanders' spending habits will change with incomes impacted by Covid. Two-thirds will put big plans on hold. Big retail purchases, home improvements and changing jobs – those decisions have been made for them. In the global financial crisis, lipstick sales went up because it is a one-off, affordable purchase that makes you feel good and you haven't broken the bank. People will go out and order one glass of the best bubbles, not six bottles of the next best.

Austerity and common sense were seized on as the way forward, but even prophets of doom had their critics.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

I've had no negative feedback on my warning messages until this week when a wealthy business owner gave me arseholes about how she felt I was being negative on the economy and slamming businesses and throwing them under the bus. It wasn't a great start to the day. I don't think sticking your head in the sand and saying it's not going to happen will work. This is not an 'if', it's a 'when'.

Beauty salon owners feel like they are the next McDonald's. Everybody needed a haircut after lockdown. There will be the brief resurgence where everyone rushes out and hairdressers will be extremely busy for about six weeks, and then everyone will have done what they needed to do. Salons will be left with the same costs and much smaller businesses unless they change things. This recession will be deep and long, so we won't feel all its ramifications straight away. Encouraging customers to save and not spend is the new corporate responsibility.

New ways of working and new work values began to show up in surprising places.

Mark Stewart

Our local New World has a coffee place inside, but they announced they wouldn't be opening their coffee station in order to support the other coffee businesses nearby. I thought that was great. A situation like this can bring out the worst in people – the self-preservation instinct can rise up and take over. Other people are all about how we can get through it together. It will be interesting to see whether businesses are impacted reputationally from how they acted. One bank's name kept coming up as the biggest problem for some of my clients.

The message that people should strive to take care of their psychological wellbeing was repeated frequently.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

I had 20 days in a row without a day off. When you are at home, it's not as stark. If you went to the office for 20 days in a row, you would be very aware of that. On Friday, I planned to finish work early and mentally check out before going mountain biking on the weekend. It's a 15-minute drive to the site for me. I checked with council and it was open.

A form of back-to-basics hibernation offered respite for some.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

We have been stocking up ahead of the big rains. There has been lots of gathering of kindling. I had a weird moment under the trees collecting kindling when I realised how far away I was from where I was at the same time last year – on a casino floor in Las Vegas. As far as the eye could see there were tables and games and people, and now it was a ghost town. I read a story in the *NBR* about frequent flyer points being at risk, so I quickly stocked the wine cellar on those.

Work was still a barrier to boredom in certain quarters.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

After all that time locked up, I was just happy to be out of the house and getting stuck into doing things at my restaurant Blue Breeze. There is only so much brie you can eat. I did do some downtime stuff. I went to see my father at the farm with the horses. That was a bubble extension as I was catching up with a couple of friends in Titirangi. It has been great to do things socially.

I couldn't believe how traffic increased at level three. And I found people weren't nearly as fearful as they had been in the beginning. They were talking to each other in the supermarket. Before I always came out of the supermarket depressed. That was a big change.

If adults were diffident about bursting their bubbles, children were drivers of soul-nurturing, feel-good activities.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

We finally went for a walk in the Waitākere. It was either that or Minecraft. The kids loved getting into nature. We went to a dam where we could see how low Auckland's water supply was and marvelled at that. My work gives us a half day a week whānau leave, so on Friday afternoon we went to Takapuna and one of the girls went for a swim, which we combined with a rocky shore study exercise. Getting them focused on something else was so good. I realised it is all true what we say in the wellbeing manuals – getting outdoors is great.

Social media was a useful resource in the struggle with mental health issues too.

Sam Hardy

Mental health advocate

A lot of people from work got in touch after I told them about my OCD, saying thank you for sharing and that it helped them understand me a bit more. Some clearly didn't give a shit, but mostly the response was pretty good. My 'Fight OCD' Facebook page got up to 150 likes, which was not a big number but one I hoped would slowly increase. Very few people speak about something like this, so if I didn't do it, I

would have been doing everyone a disservice because I was capable of it.

The enforced shift from daily norms could act as a stimulus to break years-old habits.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

I bought a television. It had always been part of my identity not having one, but I was looking forward to going back to the theatre and to arthouse movies and then I looked at the level two rules and realised they wouldn't open. I also realised I could bring them into my house on a TV, so I bought one that turns into an artwork and hides itself away.

Yet for all the social and work distractions, reminders that this was a crisis about a threat to health were never far away.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

I've always been a bit of a niggle noticer. I used to have medical anxiety because I nearly died as a kid from a bee sting. My parents went into panic overload and gave me many years of desensitisation treatment, which is what caused the medical anxiety. It went away after a hysterectomy, but Covid has brought it back. I haven't had any follow-ups on the Covid from the medical profession. They don't have enough people to call and you're not a risk to anyone. Every one of our family has been through six weeks of being monitored. I spoke to the specialist, who is sending me for an MRI. He is worried about my kidneys because Covid attacks other organs, so there could be more going on. I've been reading a lot around blood clotting and implications for other organs.

The flow of news, articles and research from around the world was constant, more keenly felt for those with friends and family in hard hit areas.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

The UK situation was high in my thoughts because of my family over there and because they had such horrific death tolls. It was confronting reading those numbers then listening to my relatives talk about what was happening in real time. It was personal for me – my mother and stepfather live in a retirement village. They went to their caravan by the sea for the lockdown and will be stuck there till the end of the year. They told me they go along the beach for a walk every day and see large fridges that have been set up as portable morgues. I talked to UK science advisors this week and they consider it a success if the National Health Service is not overloaded. We have a very different threshold for success. If you were of the view that we should accept deaths as long as the system doesn't collapse, then we did over-react by going into lockdown. But we made the conscious decision to save as many people as possible.

More than ever people needed to be connected – but couldn't be.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

I have relatives in New York. Speaking to one brought home the awful reality of what it means to be living in an apartment building where you are petrified of anyone coming near you. And you are also on your own. This was a 50-year-old woman, living by herself with no partner and relying on social media to keep in touch with people. She had no neighbours she was connected to, just annoying neighbours she had no relationship with.

Mother's Day

Mother's Day is an event that needs always to be handled with care. Many mothers disdain it as a piece of crass commercialism, especially if it becomes necessary to point out to their offspring that they have forgotten it. In the likes of a pandemic, it seemed like a piece of normality to which it was good to cling. But like everything else, Mother's Day this year was different.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

I have the 'my wife is not my mother' argument that a lot of people do. But on the day that I was about to message the children a reminder, my daughter messaged me and said, 'Here is the plan.' They had got on with it. I also got a 'Hey, if you're thinking of anything you would like to do for Mother's Day, this is it' message from my wife.

Deborah Pead

Founder Pead PR

Sadly, my mother still doesn't know what I'm talking about, and where she is I was unable to visit her. I rang her on Mother's Day.

'I'm sorry I can't see you,' I said.

'Why?'

'Because of the virus.'

'What virus?'

'I've told you.'

'Hang on, I need to write this down. How do you spell it? I'll put you onto the nurses – I don't think they know about this.'

Kaiora Tipene

Funeral director

I went to work to help with viewings and so on. People asked why I wasn't at home with my kids. It was a personal

preference because I knew there were families whose mothers were in our care, and they wanted to see their mums. So I told our staff I would man the office while all these families came in to see their loved ones. It was the least I could do, and it made me feel good.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

Thanks for reminding me.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

It's not something I have to worry about. Normally I would go and see her grave, and my grandmother's, who is next to her, but I couldn't do that. I have one ready to go next to her.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

A few days before Mother's Day, I was with my husband delivering Mother's Day gifts to his team. Susan is the name they give to all their sheep in the sheep milk company – and all the individuals are seen as being mums of the sheep. Our kids came up with the idea of giving them a present and made cards, which was quite sweet. There was champagne, socks, hot water bottles, tea and chocolate. Driving around to drop them off felt normal and nice. And we went to see my mum on the day.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

My mother and her partner were still locked down in Taupō and hoping to come up in June. My wife Jo's mother is in a village and not allowed to have visitors. Jo has been going to the grassy area outside her mum's room, standing there and calling her mum who sits at the window and that is how they interact. She went again on Mother's Day. The two share a birthday and Jo's niece baked a cake that the staff took up to her mother on that occasion.

Not much happened at our house – possibly because there was not the usual advertising or ways to publicise it. One of our children remembered. I made a cake and Jo chose what she wanted for dinner and we had that.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

We celebrated all the mums in our whānau. We went to my mum and dad's place and everybody got looked after. My daughter-in-law and son came. We might have slightly broken some bubbles.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

I had a Mother's Day dinner at home where I allowed my ex into the house with my daughter and we all got pissed.

Sido Kitchin

Magazine editor

I did go 10 minutes away to a beach and had a walk with my husband and son and the dog. There was no one on the beach. I hoped for fresh thoughts, but the conversation kept going back to food. It's all we had talked about in lockdown.

CHAPTER 10

Alert Level 3: week two (and a bit)

5–13 MAY

Total cases to date: 1137

Total active cases: 164

Total deaths: 20

**Total tests conducted:
160,700**

5 May

The Prime Minister remotely attends an Australian Cabinet meeting to discuss a trans-Tasman bubble.

7 May

The Prime Minister outlines life under Alert Level 2. In a nutshell, level two is ‘a safer normal designed to get as many people back to work as possible’. Cafés and restaurants can open under certain restrictions, and most businesses can reopen as long as physical distancing and other safety measures are maintained. Inter-regional travel will be allowed but not encouraged. Wedding and funerals may be attended by no more than 10 people.

8 May

World cases of Covid pass 4 million.

Air New Zealand pilots agree to a 30 per cent pay cut, with 300 to be made redundant.

11 May

The government announces the country will move to level two on 14 May.

13 May

Parliament passes a law allowing police to search homes without a warrant if they suspect gatherings exceeding the

permitted maximum are taking place.

The number of people permitted to attend funerals under level two is raised from 10 to 50 after widespread complaints.

* * *

There was widespread relief at the announcement of a move to Alert Level 2. When the country moved to Alert Level 4 there had been little time to anticipate it, and less knowledge of what to expect – New Zealand had never been in lockdown before. Level three was not a major change. But the move to level two marked the biggest difference between levels and, among a battle-hardened and weary populace, expectations were high.

Although businesses could reopen and many normal activities could be resumed, they would not be done quite normally. Everything had to be done with people ‘spaced out’ as the Prime Minister reiterated several times in her announcement. The ambiguity of the phrase led to it being quietly dropped from the Covid discourse – an uncharacteristic blip in the otherwise seamless communications programme that had helped get crucial messages across so far.

But the positive mood was not universal. For those with health problems or mental health conditions, Alert Level 3 had offered a degree of safety and security that they feared would be lost with the much looser restrictions of level two. And – in the security of knowing New Zealand looked likely to beat the virus – critics began to revisit past decisions and question whether we should have gone into strict lockdown in the first place.

The first day at Alert Level 2 would also be the day Grant Robertson delivered the government’s Budget, which raised the question ‘What on Earth can he do to get us out of this?’ in nearly every mind, including his.

Even among the scientists, there were doubts about the decision to move to Alert Level 2.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor

My workload spiked a couple of times because of the move to level two. Obviously, any time there was a big decision to be made there was a sudden need for evidence and checking and helping to explain

things. The decisions around level two were possibly the biggest of all because that was when we would introduce most risk back in. Most of the work on this was done by the Ministry of Health. My work was about making sure other perspectives had been heard and working with the modelling team to make sure their models were addressing the questions that the health people were asking. Sometimes the answers diverged. If they did, we needed to understand why.

Not all the experts were convinced.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

I was worried. We had to get the timing right and that was hard because we didn't know when that was. I was nervous because of how we had behaved in level three. Level two was also restrictive, with maintaining social distancing necessary.

As for going back to work, we had open-plan offices and multiuser laboratories and there was no way we could work in there under the physical distancing rules. We would have to do shift work and work out some bubbles.

Two months out of action was a long time for us. I had people on short-term contracts, and we had things to achieve for our funders. But we were in the middle of a global pandemic. I wasn't going to put pressure on the people who worked for me. If necessary, I would front the funders and point out what the situation had been.

I had to think about the long term – while I was obviously sad our research hadn't been happening, I wanted us to do this once and well. I had been trying to articulate this to my lab. At level three we were told we could apply for some of our people to go back to do essential work. There was an email about it sent to my floor and almost everybody said they had to come back. I thought, 'No, you don't.' I thought they were taking the piss somewhat.

Around the world, we had seen cases start to grow again if they hadn't been controlled enough before restrictions were released. For example, Australia saw a new cluster appear in Melbourne after looking quite good. The new cluster went from something like 49 to 75 in two days.

At two cases a day, things looked good. They were related to overseas travel or linked to existing clusters. But if there was someone out there linked to a cluster but not picked up yet, we wouldn't see that for another week.

The problem was that the cases we were seeing at this point reflected infection in the past week or two, so we didn't know how effective level three had been. I would have preferred another week to really know that we had nailed it.

There was another problem on the horizon – the possibility that if a solution in the form of a vaccine were found, it might not be available equally.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

It was a worry, especially when so many people were dying and the long-term consequences for countries not dealing with the virus could be catastrophic. Everywhere, the burden was falling predominantly on lower socio-economic groups, indigenous people. It was awful. The people making all the decisions were killing people who weren't like them. It was the 'othering' thing at work – other people are seen as lesser and don't matter as much. This is exactly what climate change is about – the least polluting people are being impacted the most. With Covid, we were seeing it on a hugely compacted time scale, but it wasn't inevitable that we couldn't do something about it.

Deciding how to organise the move to Alert Level 2 showed how the crisis had affected almost every aspect of life.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

Much of the week was about the whole shift to level two, not just what would it look like but the debate about even shifting there. One interesting perspective for me as Minister of Sport was what would be possible in that area. In our conversation building up to the announcement, Sport New Zealand brought in organisations to talk them through it. Clubs had to come together, and people had to train, but they needed confidence to get back out there and there was still a lot of anxiety. The sporting bodies were being practical and saying they needed to take time. They would have to put in place hygiene facilities and understand physical distancing. There were questions like: 'Where you have multiple netball courts, could you have 100

people on one court or in the whole area?’

Travel was interesting. There was still a big issue around international travel, but domestically, when we had got to this point and broken community transmission, it was less of an issue. We still wanted distancing and good hygiene, but a blanket ban didn’t make a lot of sense.

Even people who had found lockdown arduous were worried the move was too much too soon.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

A big part of me just wanted to burst out of the bubble, but there was also a sensible part saying if we had to wait a bit longer so be it. I might have been taking in too much media. I kept reading about businesses being destroyed every second that they were not plying their wares. But did I really want to go to a restaurant next week or the week after? If I was ever going to get this thing, it was most likely to be in that situation.

The rules around Alert Level 2 were sometimes frustratingly vague and left many wondering what they should or shouldn’t be doing.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury

Primary school teacher

We were not sure how to manage it at home with our bubble of eight, when the maximum of people that could be together was 10. Did it mean we could have two visitors at a time? I had an aunt and uncle with four kids down the road who hadn’t left the house the whole time. They were counting down the minutes until they could come and see us, but that would put pressure on the limit. And what was the difference between them all coming here or two of us going over there? It would be the same transfer of bubbles. In the end, we would just have to use our judgment.

For essential services, the move was business as usual – just more of it.

Chris Farrelly

CEO Auckland City Mission

It didn't change a lot for us. We never closed, so we were not reopening. We'd had to close our detox unit though, but we used the facility to temporarily accommodate a group of very unwell and vulnerable homeless people. We would now be able to put more people back into some residential places.

The one thing we would have liked to do but couldn't was open up our communal dining facility. It is more than a restaurant – it is a gathering place of homeless people and people on the edge. It is not just about food, but connection. Personally, there would be some changes. My wife, Sue, was coming back to Auckland after a month apart, then we would hop in the car to go to Napier and see our kids and grandkids. We have missed each other deeply. It's been a new experience for both of us.

The move provided a chance for people to spread their wings.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

With the news about level two, I did something I hadn't done for a long time: booked flights to Palmerston North and Wellington to visit our support centre and warehouse teams there.

I got a plan of how things would look to the team. I wanted them to have a week to get their heads around it and not be going 'OMG! What do I do tomorrow?' when the move came.

There would be more people back at work, so we had to do a lot of design solutions. We took out furniture in the offices – 50 per cent of previous capacity gave us a safe working distance. We halved the number of chairs in each meeting room. Normally people shared keyboards. We took those keyboards away, everyone has laptops. We tripled the number of spray-and-wipe set-ups.

Throughout the crisis, across 25,000 team members and 1 million customers a week, we only had two stores with a positive diagnosis. The idea now was to keep to the theme of 'follow the plan and you will be fine.'

Some aspects of life at Alert Level 2 changed since the original guidelines had been issued in March – most conspicuously, the limit on numbers attending a funeral.

Kaiora Tipene

Funeral director

If you were to experience loss, and you came from a family of 14, you could choose only 10 people to attend the funeral. Those 14 children could also have children and grandchildren. It would be really difficult for the grieving whānau to choose only 10!

I felt aroha for those who had lost loved ones at level four and waited patiently for level two in the hope they could celebrate their loved one's life with all their whānau. Ka aroha kē hoki ki a koutou. It sucked that I could go to public venues of up to 100 people, but I could not attend a tangihanga/funeral that consisted of more than 10 people, so Francis and I made a bit of noise about this.

I knew if I was going to make a statement it had to be not about us and our business. Not long after, Minister Clark's office rang and said there would be an urgent meeting regarding increasing the numbers at funerals and they would appreciate our feedback. That took place. The concern was about what safety measures a funeral home would have in place. Minister Clark didn't give us a figure at the time.

Where the hurt had been deepest, the shift was most welcome – although no one believed there would be any overnight improvement.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

It wasn't a panacea, but certainly getting some domestic travel under way was really exciting. I was delighted Air New Zealand were starting their first flights back in. Our son was booked on the first plane from Auckland and my intention was to go to the airport and roll out the red carpet. I would be there complete with my cardboard trumpet.

Henry van Asch, who owns AJ Hackett Bungy, wanted to do a 'Tourism Starts Again' session on Thursday and proposed I jump off his bungy at 7.30 in the morning wearing my mayoral chains, collar and tie. We just had to work out how to make sure I didn't lose my chains!

Operators in town were quietly confident of a reasonable level of

business. I had several calls from accommodation providers commenting on the level of bookings they had already.

The economic impact had been deferred to some extent by lockdown. Now reality had to be faced.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

[Twenty-five per cent] of our staff got restructuring letters. Some people took it well and some didn't. Sometimes people reacted the opposite from what I expected. It's been stressful but we have been getting through it. We also took out about 25 per cent of the restaurant seating. Hopefully, takeaways would pick up a bit of the slack. There would be people who didn't want to sit in restaurants but would rather stay home and feel safe, so takeaways would be right for them. But it would be what you get off the menu – I wasn't going to dumb it down for the takeaways. We needed full clarity on what the rules would be, as they seemed to change. We would work it out, even if it was a bit messy. The whole coronavirus has been messy, so making sure the changes would work was the important thing. We wanted the experience to be as normal as possible when we opened up again. We didn't want a restaurant that felt like a hospital.

Doubters still had their suspicions about what else would change.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

I didn't want to remove people's hopes, but there was a level of cockiness in people's communication with their customers. After weeks of no hair care, salons knew they were the most important people in town at level two. I liked the ones who said: 'We know what you want and will get it right. We will fit you in safely, so you are secure.' That was great. Others were going all out with massive deals and doing whatever they could to poach each other's customers.

Social life and shopping – as always – were top of mind.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

I was so ready for level two. It felt like a big weight had lifted when it was announced. I had watched a lot of TV. I was looking forward to going to the pub and having a Guinness and a bowl of fries. I could get back to Les Mills gym across the road. I needed that motivation to do exercise, and it would be good to be able to do it with friends. I also planned to see my family for the first time and go to my niece's birthday. And the supermarket finally had flour – but they didn't have any baking powder or yeast, so I made pancakes.

Zoom and social media were clearly no substitute for face-to-face human contact – and there was a determination to manage change safely.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

I am a real extrovert, so I was looking forward to going out and seeing people, and to going to work – my team is usually high energy, and things had got a bit flat. There is nothing like sharing a belly laugh in the same room.

I was getting a lot of advice. There was a lot of brouhaha in my inbox about mass masking. The evidence for masks was really hard to call. People who wore them might think they were bulletproof when they weren't, unless the mask was really top of the range and worn correctly. Homemade masks run the risk of becoming a damp rag around your face that collects germs and contaminates things when taken off. It can become a hazard.

I thought the public did well managing level three. A few people went a bit mad, but most stuck to it. On my walks, people would actively move two metres away as they approached. Satellite and GPS data showed there was more movement, but not a crazy amount more.

Level two would be so much freer it might be harder to feel safe. If we had missed a few cases, a cluster might pop up, so I hoped the contact tracers were on their game and that people wouldn't go to work when they were sick. I thought there would maybe be peer pressure which stopped that.

Returning to the old ways became an alluring prospect.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

I was really looking forward to getting back to the office. It was an odd feeling knowing we would have to deal with people face to face. We didn't do much to expand our bubble in level three but planned to at level two. The furthest I had been from Long Bay since March was the five kilometres to Browns Bay. A group of us who all built our houses together around the same time would probably catch up. It was different for the kids. The 14-year-old was desperate to get back to see his friends. Mentally, level two would be a better place to be. My mother has been really feeling the fact that they couldn't visit.

Plans that had been put on hold were coming back to life.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury

Primary school teacher

We planned to head straight to Wellington at level two to see family. That was the very first thing to do. But after that we could also get back to work on the tiny house. It had to be moved from where it had been being built to its permanent home. The site needed water and sewage and all the services connected. New travel rules meant we could leave our old bubble and move north to Kerikeri to stay at my aunty's place while that was going on.

Suddenly, people could make plans outside their work-from-home, Zoom-call routines.

Sam Johnson

Student Volunteer Army

My husband, Tyler, and I put together a huge blackboard of what we would do in the next month – largely restaurants we wanted to go to and activities we wouldn't otherwise do. Hot air ballooning. Surf lessons in Sumner. Then a big list of restaurants. We were lucky because we both had full-time good-paying jobs.

On the first level two weekend we planned to go up the mountain bike park and out for dinner afterwards. It was good to have something to look forward to.

This week, we also cancelled our honeymoon – we had planned to

go to Noumea for a week in June. I had been living in some hope it would be possible, but it clearly wouldn't be.

But for some, the thought of being able to move around more freely reignited all sorts of fears.

Sam Hardy

Mental health advocate

My feeling was that we should have been in level three or four a little while longer. I was not super stoked about it, but the decision had been made for me, so I had to accept it. I wasn't too sure how I would handle it. All I could think about was my anxiety with work. With level two, I would still be at home so there was not a massive impact there.

Businesspeople started reflecting on how far they had come, and thinking ahead to what the new commercial world might look like.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

We were happy we decided to stay out of the wage subsidy. We considered whether food retail was now more desirable as a place to work. The story about airline pilots stacking shelves was true in places. It had become a pretty desirable industry to be in and the fact there would be people looking for opportunities was an opportunity for us. There was good feeling there. I've seen people in the stores doing TikTok videos and other stuff to relieve stress and celebrate with their colleagues that they had come through a fight together.

I got asked what I had seen that I would like to see continue. The answer – and I saw it with the Canterbury earthquakes – was collaboration. I'd also like to see the innovation continue, where things that could have taken months of planning happened really quickly.

In some cases, the timetable for the revolution was brought

forward.

Deborah Pead

Founder We Are Pead

We went through a rebrand. That had been months in the making, not a reaction to Covid. The industry had changed rapidly, and descriptions of PR were no longer fit for purpose. We provide so much more than media relations. It had a really great response. We actually brought it forward to announce during Covid. We considered delaying it, but we decided we had to be confident and had to be assertive about saving our business. We had to be aggressive about finding new business.

Meanwhile, the complications around funerals extended beyond numbers permitted at services.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

I moved one lady from a simple casket into an American-style one. She had been repatriated from Australia and the family who came over with her wanted the more beautiful casket, so we did that. Unfortunately, they had to go into quarantine. There were about eight of them. We did the necessary paperwork on our end and got exemption for them to come to the funeral then go back into quarantine. But something happened at the airport and the family had to go into lockdown, meaning we might have to hold their mother for 14 days. They applied for an exemption we hoped would come through soon.

However, inter-regional transfers went more smoothly this week. Where the iwi had agreed to it, the process worked fine.

Kaiora Tipene

Funeral director

There were still problems with keeping to group sizes that were out of our control. We had someone all ready to be transferred back to her home, and the night before the son texted and said: 'Sorry we can't bring her home. I don't want to get into trouble and it looks like there will be more than 10 people because over 50 people have already left flowers.'

Decisions around crowd sizes at tangihanga – and bars and restaurants – were all evidence-based, and the evidence just kept coming.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

Internationally, funerals were a risk. We presumed that was because people hugged each other and spent a lot of time with a lot of different people. But it was also really painful to restrict them. The Prime Minister checked in with me as MOH revisited it – there had been a lot of pushback from iwi who felt betrayed that they hadn't been sufficiently consulted on the number. They were ready to go with 100 and upset it turned out to be 10 at level two. My role was to treble check the international evidence on transmission at funerals. Certainly, the more people we had at any gathering the riskier it was. We were so lucky not to have had an outbreak in the Māori community.

The possibility of a second wave of the virus had also arisen and become part of our thinking. As the number of cases gets lower, it gets almost impossible to calculate the probability with any certainty, but at any point, we could have another outbreak.

When it came to children, there was tension between the desire to return them to as normal a life as possible and to protect them from any risk.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

The kids couldn't wait to come back to the kura. They love each other. It was a very emotional day when I told them they had to go home and stay there, and it will be a very emotional day when they come back. Some people thought they wouldn't send their children back to school this year. It depends on the whānau. I know there are a couple where we were not sure what they would do, but most were planning to come back at level two. I have to respect individual family decisions. But we won't do dual programmes. Our teachers are only teaching on site – not providing external lessons online as well. It would be too much work to run two systems.

The education kids get in their own lives and this world here in the

Hokianga is better than anything we can give them out of a book. I want kids to grow into people who are hard-working, can make something out of nothing, live off the land and support themselves and their family rather than people who are academic.

But the teachers have been back at school preparing for the children. They are all completely on track with our new curriculum. We met with the caretaker to find out where the garden and orchard will go, then the chicken coop, the pig pen and the native trees. It will be amazing compared to what it is now – a blank canvas with lots of gorse.

There will definitely be talks and reflective stuff with the kids about Covid. Their writing will be around what happened in their families and their lives, but the focus will be what was the wonderful learning that came out of it.

The first pupils to go back to school were adjusting to the new ways of doing everything.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury

Primary school teacher

The kids settled into a routine this week. Their day-to-day interactions were similar, the staff loosened up a bit on some of the restrictions. They still had to follow the instructions about distancing and hygiene, but the staff were less anxious about making sure everything happened. It wasn't clear what would happen to my work. There would probably be less of it. Relievers got some work because all teachers got two days off a term and we fill in then, but that was cancelled for the rest of the term.

The inching back to normality did not mean fewer demands on those providing services for those in need.

Sam Johnson

Student Volunteer Army

Our team was pretty ragged. There was a lot of uncertainty and anxiety. We were tired of Zoom and wanted to be able to meet in person. You could do things online, but with one quick meeting in person you could work a lot of things out. The work was hard and

often thankless, and I felt a bit flat overall.

But then something would happen like a call I got from one of our operators. He had been talking to an elderly guy who was staying in a motel while he was getting cancer treatment. No one was supporting him apart from us. Or the message from the Disabled Persons' Assembly saying we couldn't stop the service now because their people are relying on it. That was fine. We hadn't been planning to stop it.

There were still frustrations and roadblocks in our way. Civil Defence wanted us to go through all these local channels for funding.

We knew the demand was going to grow. The wage subsidy covered over a lot of problems and created a sense of normality. But already more people were coming to us seeking help, particularly vulnerable people who needed help before Covid and could have used our services then.

The Chat and Unpack programme – where our people took someone's shopping in for them and talked to them while they unpacked it – was going well. The DHB loved that the volunteer could step over the doorway into the house and put the groceries in the freezer and the person had some contact.

One lady made an agreement with the student who had done her groceries for seven weeks. The volunteer would teach the lady how to use the computer, and she would teach the student how to knit.

Normal was breaking out everywhere you looked.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

I was able to spend a whole day catching up on overdue work things. I got some good news that actually created a huge amount of stuff to do that wasn't about Covid. We had got to the next round for the Marsden Fund, which is an important funding scheme for research in New Zealand. There are two rounds to the applications, and this was my ninth year of applying. Only about 20 per cent of applications make it through to the second round – in the end only a few of those get funded. I've only got to the second round twice before but never been funded. For the first stage, we had to submit a one-page proposal, but the second stage was much more detailed, so now I had four or five weeks to write that. It was a timely proposal, based on bacteria, not viruses, but studying what makes them transmissible.

Even with the restrictions of social distancing and staying spaced out, businesses began to emerge from their hibernation.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

From a coffee cart in Wānaka to our biggest customers, people were ordering similarly to what they would have done previously. It was certainly not a flood, but it was starting to eke through. That said, I couldn't see how the limited seating, the small groups, the two-metre distancing, the having to stay seated and other rules would work. Cafés are so loose and communal and easy-going that having this kind of regimented behaviour might ensure that a lot of people just don't go out.

At least we didn't have to worry about spending a lot of time down at the bank. Instead of knocking back our loan, they asked for even more material, all of which we supplied. As far as we could tell, they now had nowhere to run. We were waiting to see what else they came up with to put us off.

Meanwhile, we continued to work on coming up with pandemic-proof products. It turned out there were a couple of areas that had been staring us in the face all along. We could see opportunities to develop parts of the business that could expand dramatically. They were products outside our normal range, and they were staring us in the face.

Larger businesses were also having to adjust to meet a new market.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

The move away from boring essentials to some fun and excitement was starting. We thought people would value New Zealand-ness more. And they would need to keep to budgets. A lot of chefs had been unlocked in lockdown, with people having to cook at home again. They hadn't been great cooks and, like me, they probably still weren't but had convinced themselves they were. What could we do to help them eat better and more economically?

Lots of hospo businesses would be moving from service to product. Previously you came into a restaurant and food was half the value and

ambience was the other half. New Zealanders were going to want a more contactless life. Now a meal from your favourite restaurant might mean one you picked up and ate at home.

The tourism business, however, was a different case entirely.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

I was aware there were serious talks underway around the trans-Tasman bubble. Meanwhile, the temporary workers from overseas were still here. We adjusted our messaging to them and suggested they think hard about whether they would have a job post the wage subsidy. If not, maybe you ought to start thinking about taking yourself back to your home country. We said that carefully. We didn't want to look like we were saying thanks for your years of labour, now push off. It was meeting the reality of the fact there wouldn't be jobs for everybody.

Health and economy were the twin poles of the pandemic response. As concern about the former lessened, interest in the latter grew.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

I have had a group of clients checking when the next stimulus was coming, what it would be and whether they could get it. But there wasn't a mass influx of that. The small business loan that was launched was designed so people applied for it themselves. I was still working to catch up on taxes needing to be paid and accounts to be filed. And the IRD were still saying don't talk to us now, we will sort it out later.

It was hard to gauge how bad it was for my clients. The general feeling seemed to be that things had been pretty bad, but not as bad as expected. It really comes down in a lot of ways to how much difference that wage subsidy made. Has that delayed the inevitable or had it been enough to put everything on hold so it can kick off again?

Boredom was the other bogey that the move to Alert Level 2 promised to put to rest.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

We took our kids to their grandfather's because they had all missed each other so much. He asked if he could have them even for an hour and we said you can have them for the night. 'Oh, yes – bring them.'

I don't think the car had even stopped before they were out, running around and playing with their grandad. It was awesome to see them like that. I didn't know how much we were allowed to be in another bubble, but it felt safe with our family, and so we joined another bubble and had a hāngī.

A quirk of isolation was that it brought people together.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

The neighbours in my building were more cheery with each other outside the lift. The lockdown had probably built a sense of community in the building. I was also able to see my partner, who could now stay in the apartment when his kids were with their mum. The phone rang a lot. I'd been trying to bring my working hours back to normal, but he was quite understanding that it didn't work like that most days.

Being able to work again was a boredom buster for some.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

I didn't get bad cabin fever – maybe towards the end of level four. But at the last week of level three, I was out working with Chef Che to get the restaurants set up again and then going home at night. My life was back to normal and I could tell what the weekend was. Days were planning menus and revamping Woodpecker Hill so we would open that in couple of weeks, after we'd got Blue Breeze set up in Ponsonby.

Reconnecting with relatives outside a computer screen was high on many lists as Alert Level 3 neared its end.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

We wanted the level two outcome very much for Dad. He was being held hostage by his retirement village who created their own rules. Their gates were blocked and had guards. We would take shopping there and they would take the stuff off us, note the address and send us away. The longer it went on, the more conspiratorial he was finding it. We explained he was not being singled out. He was 95. The isolation was much more intense for him. It really took its toll. He couldn't care less if he got the virus and died tomorrow. He just wanted to see somebody.

Some people handled the strain better than others.

Deborah Pead

Founder We Are Pead

I noticed this week that people's nerves were starting to fray. Friends started to talk about mental health. Most tellingly, I had two big arguments. I got a call from a woman, who should have known better, berating me for something I hadn't done and refusing to give me a chance to explain it. When I – with genuine concern – asked if she was okay, I got: 'Don't patronise me, you bitch.' So I ended the conversation and left her to find another punching bag. Another surprise was an email accusing us of taking credit for someone's work when we did some announcements around losing the Uber account. I thought this was not the time for industry snarking. It was time for people to care for each other. And, by the way, we were the ones who had lost the account.

It was only natural that frustration should boil over and not always be aimed at the right target.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

There were two types of people out there. Those trying to do the right

thing for their families and others, and those who were blaming others for everything that was wrong. Many people were very scared and had seen things they had spent a lifetime building be eroded. That doesn't bring out the best in our behaviour. Yet many have been willing to help others in those moments. But if you were spending a lot of time criticising saving lives rather than the economy, you were probably fairly narrow-minded and likelier to be spending time moaning and riling each other up. It baffled me.

My intent with my social media posting has been to give people new ideas. There have been so many dreary old white men being massive naysayers and super critical without adding value or decent suggestions. Broadcasters like Mark Richardson and Mike Hosking get paid what they do to be outrageous. It creates undertones even if you are not on their side. If you deliver it enough times, people start to believe there's fire where that smoke is.

Imaginations became overheated, in particular with a widely spread video expounding the view that the pandemic was a conspiracy.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

I had several hatey-type messages from people. I hadn't engaged with the *Plandemic* conspiracy theory video at all, but it was packaged in a compelling way and I heard people asking for help because they thought it looked legitimate. I was sad to see in social media this week that there was a group in New Zealand wanting to stage a protest against the lockdown. People didn't change their minds based on what I said. They changed their minds based on people they trust. The worry was that the *Plandemic* people didn't trust anyone.

Where better to vent frustration than via the medium of talk radio?

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

We had a lot of people calling about people dobbing each other in, because somebody had incorrectly dobbed Kerre in. People thought

unless it was life-threatening you shouldn't be dobbling people in. On the announcement of moving to level two, people thought Jacinda should have just got to the announcement without the preamble. A lot of people felt she didn't trust us to be sensible. No one was talking about the Budget yet. Usually that's a conversation about tax cuts, and this year I think they read the writing on the wall that there would be no tax cuts.

Everyone knew some self-caring time out was the answer, and some people even tried to make it happen.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

I followed through on my promise to take myself mountain biking and was pleased that I stayed upright. Especially as the two-year anniversary of my accident when I broke my leg in nine places was coming up. I headed out to Tōtara Park in Manukau. Its Facebook page said, 'Ride alone or in your bubble'. It didn't say the gates would be padlocked and chained. So, Council efficiency hadn't changed in lockdown. There were about 50 cars lined up and down the road when I got there, which was tricky because there is no room for that. Everyone, including me, threw our bikes over the fence, clambered after them and went for socially distant rides.

Birthday celebrations were maintained as much as they could be, and small acts of kindness broke through bubbles.

Sido Kitchen

Magazine editor

I had a perfect birthday this week – a treat on the back of Mother's Day. I even got out of my leggings and wore a frock. It had been so liberating not to care about what I wore. I hadn't put on makeup in months and I didn't miss it. It started a bit emotionally. I had been quite stoic since the magazines were closed but suddenly there were a lot of sweet words and messages leading to a constant trickle of happy tears. And then random acts of community kindness. A woman I had never met came to our gate. She wanted to drop off some honey she had made, having bumped into my husband who was going to drop

off to her one of the baguettes he had been making. We ended up chatting for about an hour. I loved it.

Maintaining community support and spirit was essential for all sorts of reasons.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

The suicide bereavement group met again, and it went really well with about 20 people. The talk this time was less about the situation we were in with lockdown compared to the previous meeting, which was early in level four. People had gotten used to it and to being by themselves. It was interesting the number of people who had recently got pets, particularly dogs, and what joy they were bringing to people's lives. The laughter and the conversation and all the good stuff that come with these was generated by pictures of the dogs or the real deal. Sometimes I think, 'I've survived what I thought was the worst thing ever, so what is a virus?' My context of what is important changes for having gone through loss.

Small steps turned into giant strides.

Sam Hardy

Mental health advocate

My dad gave me a call yesterday. It was the first time we had spoken since we fell out and had resumed contact. It was kind of weird but okay. He was very normal – giving me lots of advice about things. I also did some stuff on my OCD Facebook page. I had been part of a campaign for the charity Voices for Hope and they shared my story on Facebook today. I got positive responses which was nice. Unfortunately, those things only made me feel okay for a second then I was back to stressing about work. I was due back on Monday to reassess things but thought I might ask for another couple of weeks.

With the recent past still hard to comprehend, and the future uncertain, some found the philosophy of te ao Māori a way to

make sense of things.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

I felt like we were on a cycle. I'm a person who believes you live for a time and a reason and I think we were given this time for a reason. We have used it to build a foundation for whānau with our moko, who know they are in a secure whānau and a foundation for the whenua we have just moved on to. I guess the foundation is understanding the world will throw you these odd balls every now and then. And we must use it to make Papatūānuku a better place to live in – for whānau, kura, the community, whatever. It's a reminder everything starts from this nucleus.

My moko were born into this era on day one. I think for all children born at this time there is something special and something scary. Is this the beginning of a new era or a decline? If it is a new era, how are we working to prepare them in their lives? If they see something like this, how will they prepare for their own moko?

I believe we have been given a warning, and I believe we won't heed this warning. Human nature means the majority of the world will go back to the same routines that created this disaster. The next ones will be worse and worse until . . . if we don't take these cues, we are doing nothing with our new knowledge.

We have been trying to make a difference with the kura, but am I changing my life as well? I don't want to be contradictory between the inside and outside.

The kids who have come out of this kura in the past are rangatira. I think the ones who are about to come back will be too. They are seeds but it's not just about growing tall, it's about giving them roots to reach out to be young men and women with a more global outlook.

One of the quirks of New Zealand's success so far at battling Covid was that no one seemed to know anyone who had had the virus. To find someone they had to look overseas.

Chris Farrelly

CEO Auckland City Mission

I didn't know anyone – I knew many people who had been tested and gone through all the waiting and worrying. We have had the ability to do significant swab testing of the population we work with who could be very susceptible, and there were no cases. If it had got into that

group, we would have been in big trouble, but they were all negative.

Deborah Pead

Founder We Are Pead

I didn't know anyone locally, but my aunt's mother in England was a sad case. She had the virus and pulled through it but suffers from severe dementia and is now in a secure facility.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

I think people might have kept it quiet because they were worried they would feel discriminated against if people found out they had it.

Sido Kitchin

Magazine editor

There was no one in my immediate circle but a person at work had it, which we found out the week the magazines were closed. It was a case of the day couldn't get any worse and then it did. I had to tell everybody. We were all remote, so we never saw the individual in person after finding out – but she was okay, thankfully. I had some people on the wider team who had had dreadful flu. They wanted to get tested but couldn't get in because they didn't have the right symptoms.

Politicians had enjoyed remarkably widespread support through the pandemic, but as the brakes were about to come off, the accusations started to pile on.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

The Opposition ramped up their rhetoric this week. People had been putting up with a lot and I acknowledged publicly there are no costless decisions. Stresses and strains have been enormous, and we have all had to adjust to a new normal. I didn't pay much attention to them, but I did notice that in the emails there were a few more conspiracy theories starting to come through.

Delivering free advice on what should be in the government's

Budget has been a popular New Zealand occupation for as long as most people can remember. This Budget, of course, was expected to be exceptional.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

I said it was a one-in-100-year shock to the economy and our response did have to be proportionate to that. We will always be careful with our spending but also had to respond and start the recovery and rebuild. It was not the end of the story. One big difference with this Budget was that it was a staging post on a long journey. We had allocated \$22 billion in the past couple of months – five or six times more than we would allocate in a normal Budget.

Among those helping society's most vulnerable, hopes were high.

Chris Farrelly

CEO Auckland City Mission

We were interested deeply in Budget announcements around food. Everywhere I turned – no matter which ‘side’ people were on – there seemed to be a real desire for every New Zealander to have sufficient food. The discussions were all about getting to the solution. We have abundance but we’ve been doing it all wrong. I was looking forward to seeing that addressed.

In some areas, the future work already wasn’t happening.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

I very much hoped for a support package for the tourism industry in the Budget. I wrote a letter of support for tourism aviation businesses this week. They catered for the high end of the market out of Europe and the US. It was not happening, and they couldn’t just turn their cost structure off. They had to keep their planes insured and certificated. They were really hurting. I hoped there would also be some announcements around shovel-ready projects and we would be near the front of the queue on that.

There were lessons to be learnt from mistakes of the past.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

I expected there would be a lot of borrowing for increased spending but no new taxes that are traditionally used to pay for it. Everyone wanted to get as much money into the economy as possible. The situation was like the 1918 flu and the Great Depression put together. The biggest issue then was letting the banking sector fail – they refused to increase liquidity so basically all commerce ground to a halt and businesses fell over en masse. We might be taking it a bit to the other extreme at the moment with money being pumped into the world economy.

Some people were too busy being busy to give the Budget much thought.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

My budget was getting the restaurant open and getting some money generated and having money to pay wages. Once we were out of this and operating then we could turn our attention to what we would like in order to stay afloat. I knew there would be a recession – the only question was for how long.

Most businesses were determined not to fall over, even hoping a radical rejig of the economy and some bigger aims could be addressed.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

Given we were able to do a radical readjustment by locking ourselves in a cupboard for several weeks, why wouldn't we collectively, with an economic reset, re-emerge with climate change as an urgent call to action? All those things that had been deemed to be too hard and politically exhausting could be embedded into the new economic

planning. The country was going into a depression and we would come out by operating in completely readjusted parameters. They could save the country and the world if they were bold enough to do it and not go back to the tried and failed.

There was no better ambassador than Ardern for that youthful, dramatic, social change She brings a lot of oldies with her – people who wouldn't have bought into socialist hippy shit.

As for the details, my partner and I hoped to see round two of the wage subsidy. Same again, please. It would potentially secure the existence of a shitload of small companies that were faltering. And it should be targeted – not just going to law firms who would have to return the money when they suddenly discovered they didn't need it.

There was still room for some of the hardy perennials of Budget wish lists.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

My hopes were that we would do something that would start fixing some of the holes in society that have meant that people are more vulnerable when situations like this happen. As someone with a high income I would happily pay more taxes. What we have seen with Covid is how important our public institutions and our taxes are. They fund our health system and other things that have been underfunded for years and I would have liked to see huge investment in them. It was frustrating that the narrative was the opposite for many people. This was the time.

As with everything Covid related, the Budget was intensively research based.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

The Budget took up most of last weekend. The Minister of Finance asked if I could put together a small group of chief science advisors to provide information on intergenerational wellbeing. Money going into the immediate crisis, if spent smartly, could solve long-standing problems. Six of us put information together that was about making

sure we didn't just help the newly-placed-on-welfare poor. We wanted to support parts of society that have always been poor. Not to pick favourites but address real long-term needs as well as sudden needs.

For the Minister of Finance, buffeted about by the vagaries of the virus, it was a tumultuous, taxing time.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

We had been well advanced with the Budget before Covid. The content was all but done. But that's life. There are bits of that Budget you won't see, bits that are still there and bits that are Covid related. We used many sources. As we developed recovery plans for different sectors, we engaged heavily with people across the board about what it would look like.

It was to be delivered on Thursday – the first day of level two – but we were working on it as late as Monday. In the Beehive, there is a lot of work done to put together the paperwork – largely releases and the background documents for those. That was being done until the night before and we were still agreeing on finer detail points.

Then there was the Treasury end. Normally, a draft Budget package gets taken to Cabinet about six weeks before it's delivered. Attached to that are the appropriation documents, technical financial documents that say \$10 million goes to small business appropriation and \$50 million to trade and training and so on.

Normally, between when Cabinet approves the Budget package – this year on 6 April – and when the Budget is delivered, there is a moratorium where Cabinet doesn't make any more financial decisions. We couldn't do that this year. The sixth of April might as well have been 1916. Since then, we had spent \$13 billion, then we announced spending of nearly \$4 billion for DHBs two days before the Budget. At that level, a lot of midnight oil was being burnt and I was signing off on things until the very last minute.

CHAPTER 11

Alert Level 2: week one

14–20 MAY

Total cases to date: 1147

Total active cases: 65

Total deaths: 21

**Total tests conducted:
216,787**

14 May

World deaths pass 300,000.

New Zealand moves to Alert Level 2.

Many businesses reopen.

Finance Minister Grant Robertson delivers his ‘R and R Budget’ with \$50 billion of spending to stimulate the economy and create jobs.

Bars welcome back Friday night revellers after two dormant months under levels three and four.

18 May

Schools are open. A prediction that many parents would keep children at home to protect them from the virus is not borne out.

* * *

For the change-averse, New Zealand had not been a great place to be so far this year. Freedoms that had never been questioned had been put on hold – people’s freedom to congregate, freedom to travel abroad and freedom to move freely around their own country. Many of these were being restored as the country moved from Alert Level 3 to Alert Level 2.

There was still a lot we didn’t know about many aspects of the virus – from transmission to side effects to whether a cure was even possible. But we did know that New Zealand’s

lockdown had produced stunning results in beating the thing, especially compared to other countries, which had adopted relatively halfhearted measures or even dangerous ones, such as Sweden's gamble on herd immunity.

At Alert Level 2 there were still restrictions on many activities, and people were required to adhere to contact tracing regimes that would record their movements in order that chains of Covid transmission could be easily tracked if they arose.

Nevertheless, most of the population, bridling under weeks of prohibitions and limits, found something to rejoice about as they burst their bubbles to move to Alert Level 2 – and a monumental Budget gave everyone something to chew on.

Big on dollars, spending a total of \$50 billion, the Budget still left many details to be filled in, a situation the Minister described using an image that seemed to age in record time.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

This Budget was really like a rolling maul, to use a metaphor which I already regret putting into the public lexicon. It didn't stop once it had been delivered. There were still decisions to come on the response and recovery paths, ranging from very large to smaller. They were around income support and households, then whether there would be another media package. At the same time, we were starting to turn our minds to the rebuilding phase and how we make that concrete. One of the other things was making sure we continued the momentum of getting money out the door. Implementation got harder as time went by.

Also, the possibility of a second wave of the virus, which had been mentioned a lot, was in the back of our minds. One of the reasons for leaving \$20 billion on the table was the possibility of that occurring. I was pretty optimistic it wouldn't. Our natural moat is a big factor and I thought we had broken community transmission with active cases down to 65. I think we were doing pretty well.

But we saw other countries like South Korea where they seemed to have beaten it and then there was a new wave.

We did keep a close eye on what was happening elsewhere, and we could tell countries kept a close eye on us, with the wage subsidy scheme being picked up elsewhere. There wasn't a lot where I saw an initiative and thought, 'That's definitely something we should do.'

Each country has its own quirks and nuances. We looked at the Canadian small business loans scheme and did a bit of design off that. We talked about helicopter money – giving dollars to everyone – but the only other country doing that was the US.

For the Minister, managing the balance between public expectations and reactions was all part of the Budget process.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

Both before and after, it's the nature of Budgets generally that there is always great expectation and hopes and they can never be met, even when doing a larger amount of spending. Even when it is more than has ever been done before, there will be areas you didn't cover. That was one part of the expectation picture. The other part was the desire we and everybody had to rebuild and rebuild better. That idea that we would have a perfectly formed vision for the next few years in the middle of the greatest crisis in a century . . . We could never meet that expectation perfectly, even though people want it because they had issues they cared about. But I think we did a good job of both parts. I've been in politics long enough to be used to not pleasing everybody.

Naturally Covid-19 came in for some Budget attention, to the relief of the science community.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

There were bits and pieces in the Budget for science. There was money for Crown Research Institutes, including the ESR [Institute of Environmental Science Research], and there was money to connect researchers here with the international research. And I was pleased to see some money for Vision Mātauranga, which aims to better incorporate te ao Māori knowledge into science.

Business would probably have described the Budget as a rolling maul.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

We had a board meeting on Tuesday looking at what it changed for our 18-month plans. It didn't change the goals, it changed the order we would do them in – areas like digital, flexible work and categories of customers. We start with what something means for our customer and what they want – that's still food safety, food solutions and experience that suits their desire.

Where people struggled for basics such as food and housing, there was much to like, but still some big-picture gaps.

Chris Farrelly

CEO Auckland City Mission

The Budget reinforced money for housing, and there was the most significant ever contribution to food security. We would have liked to see some welfare reform recommendations. We have to get people's incomes up. We were heading into a situation where there were so many people on the subsidy. Once that went and they moved onto a benefit, things would become dire. We wouldn't just live with that. There was \$20 billion still to be spent and we will continue to have conversations with government as the thing unrolls. We have voices and hopefully together we can improve things.

Most people thought life improved with Alert Level 2, even those who hadn't had much chance to notice life outside their bubble.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

My days had revolved between Parliament and home. At the end of Budget week, I planned to put petrol in my car for the first time in eight weeks – because if I didn't, I wouldn't have enough to get home. I was out on Lambton Quay a few times during the week and there were heaps more people around, plus a few cars. I was waiting for lunch one day and counting shops that weren't open. There were a couple obviously planning to reopen, but also a travel agent that I didn't think would.

There is a fish and chip shop at the bottom of the hill where I live,

and the lovely guy who ran it hadn't been visible through four and three. I thought maybe he had decided to kick it in the guts. But driving home last night at about five to eight, there he was with lots of customers and he was so thrilled.

On the weekend we managed to have dinner with friends for the first time in a long time. And a few days later I attempted to have a day off on Tuesday, making the most of level two. I did a bit of personal maintenance – some dry cleaning and buying some shirts. My partner headed off on a road trip around the South Island with some friends. I helped him get ready and dropped them at the ferry. They used the need to boost domestic tourism as an excuse.

The world was returning to this version of normal quite sedately.

Deborah Pead

Founder We Are Pead

On Thursday at 8am, I was at my hairdresser. I had been lobbying her throughout and it was wonderful. I washed lockdown out of my hair. Later, I went into Mitre 10 where there weren't many people and those who were there were very polite. Then to Farro where everyone was standing back and being kind and gracious. No food riots there. I got a dentist appointment, but only after answering a lot of questions about whether I had been tested and who I had been in contact with.

On the weekend, we caught up with friends from our apartment block. We went out for takeaways. The restaurants in the Viaduct were empty and as we walked with our food around to Wynyard Quarter it was like a ghost town. But then we sat on the deck and watched about 200 yachts which had been on some sort of miniregatta and it was wonderful. It was so weird. It was like we had been travelling and come home. Then I saw a Ferrari and smiled. Normally I would say, 'Wanker,' but this time I thought, 'This is Auckland. I've missed this.'

Nostalgia for the delights of the mall did not necessarily reflect the new lived experience.

Kaiora Tipene

Funeral director

We went out shopping on the weekend, thinking it would be amazing to go to the mall and into any shop we liked. We get inside and there were lines galore for each shop. We decided to keep walking and walked up and down for about 40 minutes. Finally, we found a shop without lines and went in, even though it was one I'd never been to before and they didn't sell anything I wanted. So, we didn't get any shopping done – just had a nice walk in a mall.

More than anything it was the ability to reconnect with family that made the difference, even though there could still be limits there.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

I got to see my grandfather for the first time since lockdown. I was his first visitor and took a little video when I walked in so I could share that with the rest of the family. It was so sweet – he only teared up when I was leaving. The village had very stringent health restrictions operating. I had to wear a mask and do hand sanitising and get my temperature taken. I couldn't touch or hug him and didn't try to break the rules, especially as I had just come from Les Mills and work.

I broke my own bubble on Wednesday, a little ahead of the official midnight mark, to go to my family in Pukekohe and stay the night because it was my niece's birthday. She was 11 and I was the first person to come into their bubble, so that was exciting for everyone. I'm officially the crazy aunty and sister-in-law.

Life in general was definitely starting to feel more normal but the gym was abnormal. Every second locker was blocked and every second exercise machine couldn't be used. When I went to the supermarket, I was happy to see vege prices were back to normal. When this all started, initially all the questions Jacinda was getting were around how much cauliflowers cost. We had forgotten that already.

Breaking out for some meant getting as far away from other people breaking out as possible.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

Most people would have been surprised I didn't rush out and get my hair done but I had no desire. I was sure at some stage I would. Instead we went back to our place on the peninsula in Coromandel. It was the first time I'd been back since I self-isolated after the UK, when I actually had the virus. We went to the supermarket and I saw the checkout lady who served me when I was there last time. It turned out people who knew I'd had it were scared of me. She had a look of horror on her face.

The domestic tourism industry was a great hope of the recession, but it was slow to show signs it was recovering.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

I went to my bach at Great Barrier, escaping with a bagful of reading – not all for work. Auckland Airport was very strange – it was as though I had fallen into Eastern Europe in the late 1970s. It was pretty deserted, but everyone who was there looked quite stressed out. Nothing was open and there were strange messages over the loudspeaker. Everyone had to show ID and I didn't know why. There were only a couple of flights and only three other people on our tiny plane – we were all masked. It was great when I got there. I walked, read, pulled some carrots out of the garden. And it was good to see they were doing contact tracing on the island.

But those in hard-hit areas were pleased to see any signs of life.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

It was like someone had turned a tap on. There were a lot more people out and about. I made one interesting discovery. We have had a bit of congestion on the roads here in Queenstown in recent years and locals have always blamed the tourists. But on Monday morning, when the kids went back to school, even without the tourists, it was no different. The roads were full with all the kids being dropped off or driving to school.

There was no discernible pattern or rationale to the behaviour, but some parts of town were definitely busier than others.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

I was shocked at how busy it was outside. Social distancing didn't seem to be being adhered to that much. There were big throngs of people around, all getting close to each other. I went into the office on the weekend to tidy up and update computers and things for reopening. I couldn't get into Bunnings, I couldn't get into Pak'nSave. Everyone was enjoying their freedom and making the most of it.

Domestically, there were mixed feelings. The boys were very happy to be able to catch up with friends and get out of the house a bit more. My wife, Jo, was a bit down because now she was at home alone again. She had enjoyed having the family around.

Compulsory togetherness had worn out its welcome for many.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

The first day the kids were back at school there was just me working at home. We did go to Noel Leeming because we could and because it was supposed to be the normal thing – but I realised it was a waste of time and we were buying stuff for the sake of buying it.

But then we went to visit friends on a lifestyle property in Ōrātia and I thought, 'That's a good life with the beehives and sheep and kids who can charge around all day outside.' That was a highlight of the weekend – hanging out with friends like in the olden days. Except we didn't do the usual hug thing. There was an awkward moment around that. Still, we shared dinner, and probably droplets, and drank and laughed.

Relaxed rules around contact weren't to everyone's liking.

Sam Hardy

Mental health advocate

I had my first face-to-face session with my therapist since lockdown. It was a bit weird. I had to sanitise my hands and record my name and

number for contact tracing. He would only do online banking because his Eftpos machine didn't have payWave and he was keen to limit contact as much as possible as per government recommendations. If it weren't for Covid he would probably have tried to make me use the machine to expose me to a bit of contamination.

In some ways, Alert Level 2 was a huge sigh of relief confirming that life would go on, though not everyone was ready for that.

Sam Johnson

Student Volunteer Army

There were still some people we were delivering groceries to because they were too scared to go out. I went for a run by the river and got yelled at by someone else for not maintaining social distancing. 'Two metres, mate!' I had been in another place altogether.

There were so many normal things to do. I had a massage on Saturday and went out for coffee. I didn't do a lot of mixing with other humans straight away, but we went out to dinner. We planned it. We booked. We got dressed up. It wasn't what we normally do. It was about bringing a sense of occasion back to something mundane, and it was nice to be in a place full of people.

Even impromptu road trips were possible under the new order. The lockdown had been such a short, successful shock, people didn't realise what they had been missing.

Sido Kitchin

Magazine editor

I made a spur of the moment decision to go from Auckland to Wellington with my friend Carey. It meant I could also see my father and stepmother. We left on Friday morning and it was absolutely glorious – such perfect weather and beautiful autumn colours. My eyes got a bit stingy from taking in long distances instead of staring at my phone and computer. I had to change my contact lenses halfway down for the big skies. Seeing the mountains was spectacular.

I avoided the city while we were in Welly. I just went to Dad's and stayed there. My dad is one who will always say he's fine even if he's not. It was good to see they were okay. There was evidence of a lot of

reading: piles of books, newspapers and magazines everywhere. I basically continued the bubble life there, eating, crossword puzzles, breakfast running into lunch into dinner.

Stopping for a pie on the way down and a sausage roll and a lamington on the way back was great. Everyone in the small towns was very happy and pleased to see people coming through.

What was loveliest about the roady was being able to say, 'Oh, yeah, we can do this.'

Days off were breaking out all over.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

I had pretty much two days off in a row, including one where I almost got away with no media, but there were a couple of calls in the evening and that was okay. I spent Saturday trying to put money into the local economy because I haven't been financially penalised. I went to Cakes and Ladders – the games café – and learnt a new game and bought some games, because you can't not. And I was very excited to be going to the hairdresser. I was staying mostly at home, but my lab was happy because most of them were able to get back in to work. They were doing shifts to maintain social distancing and working around each other but still excited.

A break from work was not always optional. The health system geared up for a slew of Covid-19 cases that never materialised, but it still had plenty of work to do.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

I was taken out of action by some kidney stones – two of them and very large. The good news was they couldn't come out the traditional way, so I had to have an operation under a general anaesthetic. The bad news was what happened afterwards in terms of tidying up, which involved, among other things, having to remove a long plastic stent at home by myself.

But I got to see the health system at work up close in the middle of a pandemic and it was very impressive. People always say about our

health system that when you really need it, it kicks in, and that was true.

I was at home at Ōrere and in intense pain. Kerry called an ambulance and the next thing I was at Middlemore. It was a spectacular sequence of events. The first responder was a woman in a car with flashing lights. Then an ambulance. Then admitted at Middlemore. Tests. A bunch of people – nurses, orderlies – pushing me round on trolleys. Another ambulance to Auckland. Admitted there. More orderlies. More nurses. More tests. Ward nurses, radiographers, surgeons, doctors. Every single one of them was absolutely fantastic in terms of professional care.

A couple of times I peed blood over the floor, and a minimum-wage cleaner came in and said, ‘Don’t you worry, that’s fine.’ And it didn’t cost me a cent.

We know that internationally a lot of care workers have died, and they haven’t here. But the medical people didn’t know that here, going in. They were gearing up for a big event.

There was PPE, a lot of people with basic face masks and only one nominated visitor allowed. There didn’t seem to be any compromising on their ability to get me in and out because of measures for Covid.

Returning to the office was like taking a short trip in a small time-machine.

Deborah Pead

Founder We Are Pead

I went back to my office in Mt Eden. Everything was still there on my desk – some snack balls, unopened champagne, which would never have survived without a pandemic, and my calendar stuck on 19 March 2020. It was nice to be back.

There had been massive changes. The team got in on the weekend and moved desks and furniture, so we could all be spatially distant from one another. We had a QR code system at the front desk to track and trace humans.

Everyone was there except one woman who has a weakened immune system and continued to work from home. The parents on the team were beside themselves with happiness. They were spinning around the office.

Who would have thought that in two months we had gone nowhere but we had gone so far?

The Beehive also welcomed back its inhabitants, something of a culture shock for those who had worked through.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

I had to share the lift – even though it was only allowed to take two passengers. It was definitely good seeing more people, especially some colleagues who I had only seen down a computer screen for two months.

The way I work is definitely going to change as a result of this. Normally there is pressure to fly to Auckland the day after the Budget and talk to business audiences. It's my job to get on the road and sell it. This year, I succeeded in seeing and reaching far more people by sitting in my office than I ever could have in person. I did an ANZ business breakfast and a Grant Thornton one – a finance company who I do one with every year. In all I think I had eight post-Budget events where I spoke to several hundred people and was able to answer their questions. I wouldn't have reached that many people normally. I also had become somewhat weary of the Wellington–Auckland shuttle that I was doing sometimes more than once a week. I will make that change.

There was almost inevitably an element of trepidation about being allowed to be around people after being required to stay away from them for so long.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

There was a lot of nervousness. I have a desk in the open, the same as everyone else's, but also a room that I have most meetings in. Its two sides are glass and it is visible. People were walking past, stopping and waving, and I was gesturing them to come in. 'It's fine . . . Don't worry.' But a lot of it was very awkward. It was like the first day back at work after Christmas, except it wasn't.

Everyone noticed isolation suited the introverts, but downtime

had really been down for the naturally gregarious.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

It was remarkably uplifting being back working with other humans again and we did it the first day we could. We all came in – even those still technically working from home – and had a work day in the department and watched the Budget speeches together. We did the staggered start and the spacing and it was very jolly and energising.

The rest of the work week was quite quiet. There was a bit of advice on a Cabinet paper but I was able to do more work on our cannabis project and the fish project, which is about imagining a way of fishing in 2040 that is better for the environment as well as good for commercial fisheries.

My team was fully back in their office and it was lovely to see them energised by being in the same physical room. Zoom was useful for checking in with people, but for building and maintaining important relationships, I'm not a fan.

At least one return to school had been highly anticipated.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

The first day of having the children back at the kura was absolutely beautiful. We had a pōwhiri for our eight new kids and five new whānau. The returning ones were over the moon to be back. Two whānau had come back from overseas – one from Australia and one who had been in Brunei. They came back and wanted their kids to go into kura.

We had to change the tikanga for the pōwhiri slightly because we couldn't have the touching part, but it was still lovely. Not touching each other is almost impossible for our kids. We had to prise them apart.

The reality was that although we had given them the tikanga about distance and washing, they were in a classroom moving in and out of each other's bubbles anyway. Actual touching wouldn't make any difference.

At lunchtime for the first day we surprised them with hot chips – and fish sticks or chicken nuggets – for lunch. We did it to support the local business at Ōpononi. It was so exciting to see their faces when they saw those.

They said they had been bored at home and were ready to come back. Maybe not the teenage boys, who said they liked the lying around. It was easy to get used to the wonderful luxury of having time and being with your family. It was hard to pull your head out of that. But I was looking forward to seeing people get out of their Covid prisons and not make it the focus of their lives any longer. We had to move respectfully and together, and it was good to do in numbers with the kids coming together at kura.

I was kind of sick of putting hand sanitiser on and I began to wonder what chemicals were travelling into our systems through our hands. But I ordered four pedal-operated sanitisers as a precautionary measure for the children. That was \$1000 and a big expense for us.

To finish the day, we had another hurihanga when the children did a circuit of different activities and, for the last 30 minutes, we all went into the hall for karakia and waiata before the buses came. I was quite surprised to get three quarters of the roll back on the first day. There were some who would stay home longer because they had whānau at home with severe problems – asthma and heart conditions – and we didn't want kids possibly becoming carriers. It was a great start.

Normal school service being resumed, relievers were not in great demand.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury

Primary school teacher

I think all the kids I had been supervising were noticeably more relaxed once the announcement of level two was made. With just a few of them going to school, they had been desperate to have their classmates back and were so excited. I didn't get any work this week, but at home we had our four primary school cousins visit and they couldn't stop talking about it: 'I had to wash my hands, like, 17 times.'

Then the little twins told me they had been a bit naughty and touched their friends even though they weren't allowed to. 'We have to put our hands in each other's pockets if we want to hold hands.'

The risk seemed so low and really hard to eliminate. Different schools were doing different things to try to reduce risk, such as having staggered break times. A lot of the children's games involved tagging or catching each other, and they shared a lot of space such as on the floor together. They were all quite huggy, especially the younger ones.

After all this time, some parents had to adjust to daily life without their school-age kids around.

Sido Kitchin

Magazine editor

I was going to be away on my road trip when they started back at school and I said I would like to be there for all of that. It was pointed out to me that I had seen quite a lot of the children lately and Conrad could easily take them to school. Very true. There was something sweet about seeing Darcy back in his school uniform.

The message about tangihanga had been heard and welcomed.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

We were so happy that numbers allowed to attend funerals had increased to 50. That was a win for us. There were still people complaining it should be 100, and there seemed to be some inconsistency in practice, but I felt 50 was a safe number. There was another change that came in later that said you could have a cup of tea or light refreshment at funerals. We were still encouraging families to take that elsewhere. It wasn't about the food. It was about the mingling and fellowship and commemorating of remembrance.

All the bodies that had been left in our care had gone home. I had a little tangi when the final one went – that was my last flatmate.

With the lockdown receding into the past, thoughts could go back to the future it had interrupted.

Chris Farrelly

CEO Auckland City Mission

Our new Mission building, HomeGround, was the biggest project we had on – and one of our biggest ever. There were more people working there now than prior to lockdown even though they were working under a regime of distancing and strict hygiene. It was an amazing sight to see. It is a wooden building, like a giant Lockwood

home several storeys high.

Related to that, Ngāti Whātua gifted us a mauri stone, which holds the essence of the land and building. It is a taonga of great significance, which is buried to link people with the essence of the land and keep them safe. Fortunately, there was still a place where we could bury it because the concrete hadn't gone over. We were also told that Neil Finn, who has always been a friend of ours, has composed a fundraising song with Stevie Nicks from Fleetwood Mac that would be released soon, called 'Find Your Way Back Home'.

And there had been movement on the accommodation projects, getting people out of motels and temporary accommodation into permanent homes. That involved the government – the funding had been announced, now we had to do the contracts and get systems in place. That would be a big focus for the next six months that would support 250 people who were homeless.

The next challenge we saw was how to hold on to these advances. What we did in the last weeks was important. What we do in the next year will be more so.

For businesses, it was an opportunity to take a breath and take stock.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

We did a survey of our office and supply-chain people to see how they were. It included the offer of a confidential channel where people who said they needed help could get some. But 93 per cent said they felt supported, and only 7 per cent said it had been difficult to work from home and mostly it was their children's fault!

When we went over the annual results with the board, hanging over everything had been the question of what was socially and morally correct for a business that had been able to keep performing. We made a couple of important values-based decisions.

Considering a pay review for the core workforce was one thing. Through an interesting set of steps and me putting it to the team, the executive team agreed we would not take a remuneration review. People were spoken to individually because we didn't want peer pressure, and everyone said it was great. We would put the value of that in a pool – it was a meaningful number – and, as a team, select somewhere to give it to. That enabled all of us to stand in front of the business knowing we did the right thing and lived by our values.

We decided to ask two or three of the team to form a group to work out the options for where the money should go. If I said 'I like this' it would come with a certain weight. One of the first suggestions was to wait a while to see where the hurt really might be. So, that is what happened.

For restaurants, there were a whole slew of rules and guidelines to keep proprietors from getting complacent.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

I was back to the grindstone like a whirling dervish. I was quite excited about the changes for the fact that it has changed and I love change. Having been through downturns before – if you sit there and do nothing, that's crazy. You've got to adapt to the market.

The market is definitely changing now we are dropping it in. We put two restaurants into one at Woodpecker Hill to meet the market. We decided to call it The Golden Nest at Woodpecker Hill just to let people know we had changed. Clientele who loved the old restaurant are not going to be paying \$38 for a curry moving forward.

The start of level two was quite challenging when we reopened Blue Breeze in Ponsonby. Jacinda had said one server per table and our business model was very different from that. Looking into it further, realistically, it was a very mixed message. We went back to the old way for Friday where we had one waiter and one runner per table and that worked a bit better. Then we changed again on Saturday, down to one server. Every day the whole system changed, and people were still pretty nervous. One guy said we needed to keep the music down because when you talked loud the Covid travelled further. But a lot of other restaurants had gone to the extreme where you felt like you were in a hospital with zero atmosphere being waited on by a guy in full hazard suit.

As the crisis seemed to grow less severe, speculation and confusion found room to grow.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

Media were trying to read something into the whole experience. There had to be problems. Surely every New Zealander was going to require heaps more mental health services. Maybe. We didn't know. It was hard to collect data. I wouldn't be surprised if there was an upswing, but not being too Pollyanna-ish about it, it didn't have to be that way. There was a recognition based on similar catastrophic events elsewhere that, in time, there was likely to be more demand, but that wasn't a given. That was my personal take.

We told media what we should be doing to ensure mental wellbeing: reach out, go to services that exist, be kind and support each other. But we didn't have any numbers, just a lot of anecdotal stuff. There was something comforting about level four. You knew where you were.

Elsewhere, there were surprising and welcome signs of an upturn.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

We got an order. We have delivered to an upmarket drinks company in Hong Kong in the past two or three years but thought they had faded away, so it was very timely to have an order land on us for a full pallet of classic chai syrup. Good business, good dollars and totally export.

We have more or less decided that we are going to be wholesaling processed organic ginger ourselves as soon as we can. It will be processed in Fiji and frozen, then stored here and fed out to other manufacturers. The village we support and get it all from are changing everything to organic on our behalf. The least we can do is buy everything they make. Rebekah, my business partner, started advancing the thought – we sell finished products, why not just get to the basis of it and wholesale processed ginger?

We also intend, now and in the foreseeable future, to do local deliveries ourselves as a means to avoid the shambolic courier chaos of late and also to maintain nice, personal contact.

Work stress took various forms and had various results.

Sam Hardy

I was told to have another couple of weeks off work. My psychologist and I agreed I've been suffering from work-related stress and it's been quite gnarly. Because I've been working from home, I've tried to remove everything that reminds me of work from my sight. Having all the negativity from work around me was distressing. I've covered up my work computer, various equipment they have given me, a headset, documents I had that I needed to use.

Meanwhile, there was still a handful of people with the virus and a large number of people who had been through it. They found themselves in a unique situation.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

I was still taking some precautions. I wore a mask around my mum because I didn't want her to get anything – that would be catastrophic. I hadn't really seen anyone – Coromandel was the first time I had gone to the supermarket. I made the kids wash when they came in from different places. But there was still nothing to say I couldn't get it again. I didn't know if I was a Covid survivor because I didn't have a definition for that. They call it recovered, but I'm still unconvinced about the long term so took that very cautiously.

Contacts were being maintained and information exchanged here and around the world even as the New Zealand experience differed from that of so many other countries.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

I had a Zoom meeting this week with all the chief science advisors for different ministries. It was the second one we'd had, and it was fine, but we agreed we wanted to do every other one in person from now on. In meetings like that, everyone swaps notes on what goes on in their home ministries. We have different deep-dive topics every month. For example, the Chief Science Advisor for transport connected with the one for health to make sure what they were advising lined up, and he had been in contact with his counterpart in

the UK about how to do buses and trains safely. That group is interesting because it was one of few groups in Wellington that has a cross-sector view. We all swap notes and hear information from outside our home sectors that might be hard to access otherwise.

Checking in with the Australians was interesting. They were feeling confident. Some states were in the same position as us, but Victoria and New South Wales were getting little outbreaks and cases they couldn't trace. On a call with other scientists overseas, everyone was relaxing restrictions but fearing a second wave. The mood was very different nearly everywhere else from what it was in Australia and New Zealand.

I haven't taken reports of progress of vaccines seriously when people talk about getting very fast results. I did see some very sensible commentary about the need for the world to back at least 20 or so vaccine candidates in order to find the one that has an impact.

Then there was a poll this week that said 16 per cent of people wouldn't take a vaccine. That was quite frightening. That said, I know really sensible immunologists who say they wouldn't take an early vaccine candidate. One of the reasons it takes so long to get one is that the safety trials take so long. It wouldn't be a good time to be a rhesus monkey.

With so much information or misinformation floating around, pushback against restrictions was more and more widely felt. A cohort failed to see the connection between the low fatality rate and the high-intensity reaction.

Siouxie Wiles

Microbiologist

I have been really struggling with the 'only 20 people died therefore we didn't need to be so restrictive' argument. You only have to look at what's happened overseas. On one of the days when I decided to disengage from the world and spend time with my family, I still managed to see a tweet – which may not have been true – about a company that had devised a hospital bed that turned into a coffin. Some countries were running out of coffins or out of safe ways to deal with dead bodies. I saw that, then I had people yelling at me that we had over-reacted. Juxtaposition of those two things made me feel sick.

One of the things that has been difficult is our inability to comprehend big numbers. We are in a privileged position because our numbers have been so low, we haven't seen all of the horrendous

complications, like the Kawasaki syndrome, people in their forties having strokes.

I did an interview with the BBC – they know now my parents are in the UK. They asked what I thought about things there and all I could say was that they could have done things differently and not be in this situation. It was sad – there were places trying to tell themselves they were doing really well with 30,000 deaths.

It could be hard to know who to believe.

Gary Wallace

Real estate salesperson

I had a doctor client and I was trying to follow protocols with my hand sanitiser when he said, ‘Gary, seriously, I’m a medic and in my opinion you’ve got a better chance of winning Lotto than catching Covid.’ Some people have looked at it that way. Others have been very respectful and very quick to let you know about the two-metre thing if they thought you were getting too close.

Others saw that what the government’s team of 5 million – or their own work teams – had achieved deserved to be celebrated.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

When we win a World Cup we go, ‘Yep, so we should have. That’s what we expect.’ We don’t celebrate well as Kiwis and this wasn’t any different. Within the company we had conversations about being proud of what we had delivered, and debated whether we should have a party. We decided not until everyone was happy again.

The busier you were, the less likely you were to miss the party.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

I think through the process we did do it as a team, but I didn’t realise at the time that there hadn’t been that celebration moment when we

were able to go to level two. We have been looking at a way of acknowledging New Zealanders' efforts that would bring us together. We've given that a bit of thought and do think it's worthy of something. The opinion polls are reflective of the fact that New Zealanders have done it as a country. It's been a job well done and people were buoyant about that. The way the Budget landed also reflected that. People had issues or concerns but overall were saying it was the right thing to do. What I've picked up has been positivity tempered with a small degree of anxiety.

But before the party really got going, there would be more serious matters to contend with at every level.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

There were signs of improvement with some of our exports. Forestry was doing all right, particularly back into China. Some data this week showed our exports to China were slightly above where they were last year but in the rest of the world down quite a bit for the month of April. That showed China had come back but other export markets were clearly still down. Tourism and international education, of the ones affected at the start, will be struggling for a long time.

Queenstown continued to find new problems.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

More stuff kept coming up. An interesting revelation in recent days was what is now being called 'the new poor'. Imagine you and your partner comfortably in your own home with a mortgage, a couple of cars – one with hire purchase – and a boat or caravan. Life is pretty good and suddenly both of you have lost your jobs.

The government's means test for benefits takes account of your assets, but the reality is flogging off cars and so on in this market is a bit of a challenge, and so is paying your mortgage. We anticipate the government will have to have a hard look at how they decide who gets a benefit. Basing this on the fact people might appear to be comfortable but are not, won't be equitable.

I know a bloke around 60 who lost his senior position in a big company last week. It is pretty hard to get a job in your sixties. Will he end up driving a cab?

Everyone was making adjustments they would have preferred not to.

Gary Wallace

Real estate salesperson

I was out with a client who owns a lot of commercial and retail property and asked him how he was getting on with his clients. He said a lot of the big office space had been okay, but retailers had been devastated. He told me the only way to cope was by looking after his tenants: work with them, hold onto them and try to get them to survive this. If they folded, with what was on the horizon he would be left with an empty shop that would be hard to fill. Sensible people were working together.

The call for New Zealanders to work together to support their local tourism industry was received and understood.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

Sue and I thought we would take a break and I learnt that, although I probably would have normally gone somewhere like Queenstown, I wanted to head north. I thought that was fascinating. My deduction was that it was partly about not flying. There was a comfort level attached to travelling in a car rather than an aeroplane at this stage. Hopping on a plane full of people – not yet.

And the domestic tourism industry wanted everyone to know it was ready for them.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

I took the red carpet out to the airport to meet the first Air New

Zealand flight back in. The terminal was a bit of a ghost town – only open to travellers and not meeters and greeters. There was the local MP and me and a band playing, and as the people got off, we clapped and shouted, and they all thought it was pretty special.

There have been a lot of ideas going around about how we can do tourism better when we restart it. One challenge in recent years has been all the middle men, who take fees for booking this and that, leaving the operator with 50 or 60 per cent of the price. There is some determination to try to cut some of that out going forward.

Contact tracing

Moving to Alert Level 2 made contact tracing a crucial part of the anti-Covid strategy. People were asked to record their movements, in particular when they entered or left business premises including bars and restaurants. The methods of tracing were many and various. The most frequently encountered seemed to be a piece of paper on a clipboard on which customers were asked to write their name and contact details when they went into shops. Many weren't confident about this, particularly when it emerged that a worker at one establishment had used it to obtain a customer's details and make unwelcome contact. An official app using a QR code was launched late to relatively lacklustre uptake. In general, people found the experience frustrating and less than confidence-inspiring.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

I had to get my car after a service and do the whole QR thing, and it was pretty annoying. Then I found out you only have to do it once with that system and it wasn't so bad. I just needed someone to explain that and the angst went away.

Deborah Pead

Founder We Are Pead

My experience was a pathetic piece of DIY paper where you put your name and a number, and someone was standing back observing. Everyone was picking up the same pen, so I used my own. In one store, they just said, 'Oh, it's okay,' and I wondered if the rule had been stopped now. I did leave my legit name and number because I wanted to be tracked if there was something wrong.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

I didn't download the app straight away. At Glengarry, they didn't have the wine I wanted and I had already given my details. I thought it was a bit freaky because everyone could see your details on the list. What if some creep saw me and photographed my number? I walked into another wine store where there were signs saying don't touch the wine, but they didn't have any contact tracing at all.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

The stupid QR things, which were better than having to write or say your name and phone number, seemed to be pretty much everywhere. Dunkin' Donuts had it. Subway did too. One morning I had a coffee and had to write down my details. I didn't know how it was being used or what happened to the information. I presumed some moron at Facebook was tracing my every move and I'd get coffee and doughnut ads popping up forever.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

I had a very mixed experience. There were a couple of places where it was fantastic – you couldn't get in until you scanned the code, then it texted you saying you were in the queue, then you got a text saying you could go in. Then I went to a shop that did nothing at all, which I was surprised by.

Vicki Wallace

Real estate salesperson

I went to Blue Breeze for lunch and they had the app that you filled in to register. That was really good. I also went into Mecca in 277 to see what they were doing. They were doing heat temperature on your head and taking you round as an individual customer. You couldn't touch things. That was good too. You couldn't put your fingers into the testers.

CHAPTER 12

Alert Level 2: week two

21–27 MAY

Total cases to date: 1153

Total active cases: 30

Total deaths: 21

**Total tests conducted:
250,246**

21 May

Many bars open today as part of the phased introduction of Alert Level 2.

Options to help economic recovery, such as a four-day work week and new public holidays, are suggested.

World cases total passes 5 million.

Coroner confirms the number of suicides was lower than average during lockdown.

22 May

Todd Muller replaces Simon Bridges as leader of the National Party.

25 May

Income Relief Payment programme announced – weekly for up to 12 weeks available to households earning under \$2000 a week. Claimants need to be in training or actively looking for work.

PM announces an Alert Level 2 reset and says there will be another on 8 June, and that the government is looking to go to Alert Level 1 on 22 June.

While conducting a TV interview, the PM barely pauses to note the impact of a 5.9 earthquake near Wellington.

26 May

With Parliament sitting again, the government shuts down an

effort by the Opposition to extend the life of the Epidemic Response Committee.

A contribution of \$37 million to vaccine research is announced.

28 May

The death from other causes of Covid-19 sufferer Eileen Hunter is officially recorded as a Covid-19 related death, bringing the national toll to 22.

* * *

As daily life got better, people had time to notice that the future looked worse. Concern shifted from the immediate health crisis to the long-term economic crisis, which was still far from making itself felt to its fullest extent. The Budget was greeted with reasonably positive responses – but then no one knew what a Budget in a pandemic was supposed to look like or even what it could be expected to do.

While many had embraced the new freedoms of Alert Level 2 – open shops, kids back at school – with enthusiasm and relief, there was nevertheless a core of people fearful that the virus was still out there. The figure of active cases was low by global standards. This, while good for the health of the nation in general and for morale, meant it was easy not to understand how firmly and fatally Covid-19 had parts of the world in its grip. Our relative security understandably led to calls for even faster and broader loosening of restrictions, not always from a scientifically well-informed vantage point.

The Minister of Finance spent more time on the virtual trail selling the Budget to community and business groups.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

It had to be a virtual tour this year, but I reached more people than I ever had before. In just one morning I addressed a North Shore community business audience and the Hutt Valley and Canterbury chambers of commerce – that's several hundred people – plus I was getting out and about in Wellington talking to people.

There was a lot of gratitude overall for the way we did the response phase, but each group had their nuances. On the South

Canterbury Chamber of Commerce call, the Mackenzie Country people, who are tourism-based, were really worried. They wanted to know detail about the tourism recovery package and how that would work. Hutt Valley was more around infrastructure and how would they get their bit of it, and the North Shore one was a bit more about how to support their communities.

There wasn't a lot of questioning of the quantum of our response, which has been part of the media discourse: 'Gosh! Fifty billion dollars!' But we also had to be upfront that we had tough times ahead. We never sugar-coated that.

In a speech I made on 17 March, before lockdown, I said this was going to be deep and we wouldn't be able to save every job. That didn't mean that when those things happen it is not devastating; it is hurtful for all of us. We had Air New Zealand and Fletchers, both big employers, announcing big job cuts. Both of those had been ongoing processes for some weeks, but it was still hard to hear when it meant more than 1000 people in both organisations. That was why we wanted to get across that the Budget was a continuation of the 'we're all in this together' approach.

Soon life under lockdown would be a memory and the recovery would be what mattered most.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

The apprenticeship package was good news. Now we had to work on how it would be applied. We hadn't seen a package of that size before, but we have been advocating for that sort of assistance, so it was good to see it here. We were also noticing senior managers being laid off. We see it when we have been dealing with a person in senior role and, suddenly, they are gone. These companies are looking at their senior leadership teams and trimming there, and those people are always shocked to find themselves out of work.

Jobs were falling over faster and faster, not always for the right reasons.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

Big companies were doing restructures. Some because sales had been decimated. Some realised they could do better for cheaper by doing more work online, so they were taking a moment to re-evaluate. Some companies didn't adjust – they were determined to meet their forecast profit and could only do that by getting millions out of their budgets in the form of personnel. It went back to how business works – directors are bound to deliver the most profitable return for shareholders. The short-term focus on the stock exchange is why we are going to see a huge number of people without jobs. It is such a backward thing to be doing.

New Zealand had always prided itself on being able to innovate its way out of a crisis – or a fencing wire issue – but innovative solutions were slow to appear.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

I think there is some innovation emerging. It's been about survival for people so far, but I am getting more of those sorts of conversations – the 'hat manufacturer becomes a mask manufacturer' stories.

One interesting and important thing that has emerged is the digital divide issue. We had to deliver a whole lot of modems to homes that didn't have them to do schooling in lockdown, and not only to homes but also to businesses. We also put in the Budget a fund to support small businesses with e-commerce offerings. The lockdown put in sharp relief for businesses that didn't have it that they needed it.

Also, everyone observed that emissions were down during lockdown. The government work in this space hasn't stopped and there were some things in the Budget about that. We can't do the lockdown permanently to save the planet, but there are some things we can learn that remain critical to our future. I was asked to nominate an area not in the Budget that we wanted to get on with. It is one we are already focused on around the hydrogen economy. We had started work and it is ongoing. I believe we should be the home of green hydrogen with 90 per cent of our electricity renewable. That is an example of something that won't stop.

Warehouse founder Stephen Tindall suggested making the country an international data centre. Other ideas aimed to revive

tourism.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

Why not create a high-end quarantine to bring in big spenders? Refurbish hotels so you have big suites and then they get here, have tests, quarantine in luxury, and then move out to have an extraordinary experience.

Closed borders were likely to remain that way for a very long time, the reasons for which the public needed to know and understand.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

I was writing an article on how to decide when to open our borders. It was too complicated, and I was trying to make it simple. I put pieces like this on our website where anyone can see them, but they often get picked up by the likes of the *Herald*. The broader question is very complicated. At the moment, this debate is in danger of becoming a binary one: 'Come on, this is silly. Let's open up' or 'No, we mustn't. It's not safe.' If you look at the high number of cases overseas and do some figures on the back of an envelope, you can get a good idea of what would happen if we opened them now, and how we need a nuanced, country-by-country approach.

Two groups seriously disadvantaged by the closed borders were fee-paying international students and the universities that collected those fees.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

For my day job at the University, most of my teaching is for post-grad students, and I have international students who got stranded here. One is writing her thesis and had been hoping to extend her visa, so it pleased her. The other it really had hindered because she couldn't get into the labs. That seemed familiar to me because I was working in Canterbury during the earthquakes.

In my PMCSA role, the vice-chancellors have been talking to the government about how to get the international students back. Those are difficult conversations, even though I'm on the edge of them rather than at the centre. The conversation started early on when we just closed the border to China, then it became overtaken by the larger issue of the rest of the world having Covid. On the face of it, the numbers in China look good for allowing entry soon, and I would hope we could come up with a way to accommodate the students returning. People on work and student visas wouldn't mind quarantine, which would minimise the risk.

There were other complications around the return of international students, including quarantine facilities.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

We had the army of campervans and the motels and hotels. In the medium and long term that is something that will probably come into play with people coming into the country. But we have been asked why we couldn't turn on the tap to let international students come back in now. Currently, the New Zealand government pays for New Zealand citizens to come into quarantine. Clearly, we wouldn't be doing that for international students, so institutions had to start thinking about how they would build that in.

While some sectors could expect to recover sooner, others had even darker skies ahead.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

As predicted, as we got nearer the end of the wage subsidy, the big decisions were being made and they were escalating. The big job losses were starting to happen. People who'd never dreamt of being unemployed were finding themselves out of work and on a benefit. A whole bunch of Kiwis who, in the past, have dismissed unemployed workers and been dismissive of the low rate of the unemployment benefit, were about to find out what that was like. That is not a good thing, but it is good that more people will realise you can't live on the

unemployment benefit.

Against a background of uncertainty about the future, it became even more important to reactivate the rituals and routines of normal life permitted under Alert Level 2, especially catching up with friends.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

We followed through on our plan to go to Waiheke for a weekend and it was great, although we found, as I think a lot of people have found, it a strange mix of normal and not normal. One place needed us to sign in, another didn't. There was no two-hour limit on how long we stayed at the first place, but there was at the second. Personally, I didn't feel any qualms about being with some people who live in Wellington and who we hadn't seen through lockdown. When you see people you haven't seen for a while, there is a question about whether we should shake hands or not. I said, 'Good grief, we are about to sit in the same car! Go on the same boat. Accept it will be okay.'

Those used to overseas getaways were learning to adjust their expectations.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

I would have liked to go north, but it's not the best place when it is wet, so we thought we would go to Rotorua to help with the tourism and see the country. It was a good excuse to get some fresh air and to take Maggie, who's been helping us with the children, out and about. She got stuck here and her family got stuck back in Fiji, so we will be going back there with her as soon as we are allowed to visit the islands.

Some people got out of town. Other people found new ways to get around town.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

I had a rush of blood to the head and bought an electric bike. I thought I'd justify my spending domestically to help the economy. It was also about having discovered while walking in lockdown that the Auckland cycle lanes are more connected up so now I could safely get to work on a bike. I plan to use it mainly to commute – until the novelty wears off. I like that it feels like you're exercising even when you're not.

Even a generously proportioned workspace could struggle to function properly under Covid-19 requirements.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

A socially distanced House of Parliament is different, there's no doubt about that. There is a certain atmosphere created by 120 alpha personalities being in a small space together. That atmosphere has been reduced. During the week, we saw Parliament flashing back to its former self – there was plenty of noise and lots of politics in play. I felt it getting back to normal. Now we can do gatherings of 100 that will change it around a bit. As soon as the chamber refills the atmosphere will return. We've already seen elements of it. It's been interesting watching a new leader of the Opposition start his time in a socially distanced chamber. He didn't have a cheer squad behind him.

Signs started to appear of a condition that could be described as lockdown nostalgia.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

I was having a lot more conversations and hearing from people about their experiences. It was fascinating the number of people who expressed – if this is the right word – their enjoyment of lockdown. Not that they would have if it had gone on for a long time, but they had liked slowing down and doing things differently. The line Jacinda used – 'You may not be at work, but you still have a job to do' – had been a very useful way of getting across to people what their role was.

Time hadn't stood still – but it wasn't behaving itself terribly well.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

Time was definitely being weird. Traffic in most places seemed as insane as ever, then there are pockets like downtown Auckland where everything was sparse and in slow motion. You took your normal where you could find it. The local RSC quiz night had been hit on the head, but I was looking forward to going back again when the crowd maximum was increased to 100. And Rebekah was very glad to be back at the Grey Lynn Farmers Market. It was limited numbers and people could only move in one direction, but everyone was just glad to be back and nobody minded being wrangled.

And some people weren't ready to let their lockdown go.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

I think I had a different mentality from a lot of my friends because I had been going out to work every day all through. Being out and about didn't scare me. But I had a friend who was still really worried. I offered to go over and have a level two cup of tea with her and she said not yet. She felt she was getting a lot of disparagement because she was still so concerned but she thought her feelings were quite valid.

The contact tracing app and systems that were supposed to set minds at rest and secure the Covid-free future were erratically rolled out and equally erratically adopted.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

The moment to get willing participation for contact tracing was at the start of level three or four. People would have got into the habit then. You need a solution to be widespread to work, and no tracing solution

was dominant because it was left too long. I think I've logged into about six different things in the first week.

Even the most obliging citizens found it difficult to perform their duty.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

I downloaded the app and used it for the first time at my local bar and have not used it much since. I went into a shop in town where they had tape to mark distances and were counting people going in and out, but I didn't have to sign anything. I did buy something, so they did have a record. If I hadn't bought anything, they wouldn't have known who it was. Then my cousin came in and we hugged and kissed, and people were looking – we had just forgotten.

New Zealanders' lack of exposure to the reality of the coronavirus made it easy for them to take it less seriously than they might have. Survivors were rare and the focus of intense interest.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

One night this week I was with a lot of people I didn't know, but they all knew who I was because of Covid. It was totally weird, and they had lots of questions. I was trying to tell them things but the only ones I could really get a grip on were what I had put on social media. That helped trigger the memories. I had no idea what I did for those days in hospital. I had shared my experience of Covid because, unless you see the reality of it, it is hard to give it the attention it deserves. I still had friends living outside London telling me they had been hearing sirens every 20 minutes. That is very scary.

It was perhaps a mark of the intensity of the experience people had been through that their responses to getting near the end of it were so ambivalent.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

When I catch up with people, I hear ‘I’m an extrovert and happy to be out’ or ‘I’m an introvert and dreading having to go back to be doing stuff.’ When I went out, people’s lives were seemingly the same and we were back to how it was. That’s great if you had a job – I could go and buy that TV. I heard a restaurateur when I was out, talking about how Friday night was the first time it was clear that people dining were Tinder diners.

But then you would see a headline about Air New Zealand and all the staff they were about to let go. A lot of people were nervously living life knowing some Zoom call was going to determine their fate.

Preventing that fate was very much on the mind of those in charge – even when they, too, were trying to grasp a little bit of normality.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

We did get to go out for dinner with friends, which was great. And I went to my favourite Malaysian restaurant. It’s a family-run place. The kids have grown up there and are now at uni and do the front of house. The owners have made lots of changes to the layout and how they do their menus and ordering. They said it’s been tough, but people are still coming in. They get the feeling they will be doing deliveries and takeaways for ever. They have adjusted. As has my friend with a tourism company. He cottoned on quite quickly to the pest-eradication proposals as a way to reorient his business

There was more normality – at last – for funeral directors with the maximum number of people permitted at a tangihanga raised to 100.

Francis Tipene

Funeral director

People were on the phone straight away when the news was announced. The limit went up at noon on Friday, and people we had scheduled a funeral for on Thursday now wanted it at 1pm the next

day. Three funerals changed their time from before noon on Friday to afterwards. Fortunately, they were to be held at three different locations, but I had a busy morning rescheduling with the cemeteries. I emailed them even before I got the booking because I knew they would come. For a while I felt like a pizza delivery service: ‘Hold the line, please . . .’ CLICK . . . ‘Tipene Funerals, hold the line please . . .’

People had got so used to being disappointed that they were very shy when they rang: ‘Francis, do you think it might be possible for us to change the time?’

We still had to make special arrangements for the large number of people from out of the country coming in for funerals. We had to get special permission from the Ministry for them to attend and they had to be in full PPE gear because they hadn’t finished their 14-day quarantine. We had people in this category at nearly every funeral because so many Māori and Pacific Islanders live in Australia. And we had to inform all the other mourners of their status. It was quite uncomfortable.

For us, it was really exciting. We do this job so we can give people what they want, and it had been very hard having to say no. Now we could make order-of-service sheets. Celebrants were back. Catering was back. We could order flowers. Without flowers, funerals can be very hard on the eye.

Our own Māori politicians in there were saying: ‘I know our people – they’ll go in for that cuddle and the hongi.’ Fifty was a good exercise. It was a pandemic after all, and we were aware that Spanish flu had nearly wiped us out, especially kuia and kaumātua.

I think Māori people feel more in control now because that was an issue before. I think at 50, Māori and the marae showed how well they were able to cope with 50 people at a time. It was good to show the government. Now the marae will be feeling a sense of normality.

Office work revealed some surprising positives when revisited after the long break.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

I went back to the office after about a week of staying on at home. Originally, I planned to go back to get away from the children, then they went back to school, and I realised working from home was an option and I didn’t need to go in. But then I realised I am a social being and I like seeing the whites of my colleagues’ eyes rather than

the pixelated Zoom version.

Zoom had gone from novelty to cliché to potential source of amusement.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

I had been on a conversation with a venture capitalist in London and he was using a background he had put on which was really boring. Then he turned it off and showed me he was in his four-year-old daughter's pink bedroom.

There was nothing boring about trying to get a loan out of an Australian bank.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

The bank finally said no to the loan we had been persisting with applying for all these weeks. They told Rebekah we couldn't afford to repay it because we weren't paying ourselves enough out of the business.

'You're telling me I can't live on the smell of the oily rag I've been living on for the last few years?' Rebekah asked.

There was no denial to be heard from the bank's functionary, who then played her own sympathy card: 'I've had a lot of these conversations with other small business owners and they have been very difficult.'

Rebekah wondered aloud if she should get our accountant to resubmit the paperwork.

'Didn't your accountant do this?'

'No.'

'Well, you probably should, but it will cost you more and I will still probably say no and I'm not asking you to do it.'

Rebekah said it would haunt her for the rest of her life if our business failed because she didn't fill in a form properly, so she planned to follow that path, all the time knowing the bank had no intention of ever giving us our small loan.

On a positive note, there were new business developments. Our

name will be on a new ice cream from Appleby Farms in Nelson – the result of Rebekah wooing them for three years. That was to be launched in July. And we also put the accelerator on our thinking about a separate company for ginger supply because the farmers in Fiji have grown us so much high-quality organic ginger, better than any competitor's. The potential market is everyone in the wellness department, which is about to become a lot of people in a post-Covid world.

Almost equally frustrating, we were deprived of a triumphant return to our regular pub quiz fixture. The RSC that we go to turned our emissary away even though they were reopened for business. He had turned up early to get a drink and wasn't allowed in – despite the fact we had been attending for years – because they had reached their 100-person limit. The rest of us were about to head over when he texted the sad news. We learnt our lesson and resolved to book the following week.

As people returned to their old workplaces, post-Covid protocols made for sudden territorial disputes.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

Our staff had been working pretty much full time from home, without posh workstations or much in the way of equipment at all. However, we allowed them to come into the office and get their chairs. We had a protocol for them doing that one at a time and they had to wear masks. Many had naturally come and got their chairs so they could work better from home. But, as people started coming back into the open plan offices, we didn't have enough chairs, so we had to make a rule: If you're coming back into the office to work you have to bring your chair back.

The next obvious post-Covid issues were those requiring international co-operation, such as the search for a vaccine. Given the disparities between national responses to the virus itself, how likely were we to see the necessary co-operation?

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

I think the international joint effort so far had been good but mixed. Around things like vaccine development, there had been huge global co-operation. We announced a big contribution to that effort this week. In terms of our planning, we saw it as a big announcement. It was enormously significant because it pushed us into an area we hadn't been in before.

Whether the co-operation sustains itself as we move closer to vaccines and the ways they are produced and sold remains to be seen. Helen Clark wondered where the UN was in this. As an overall entity, it had been fairly quiet. Obviously, related bodies like the WHO were important, but global fractures were present there too. I suspect global co-operation will be tested. But I believe in multilateralism for the good of the planet and because as a small country we get the benefit. There are a lot of conversations between countries already. My Australian counterpart has invited me onto a finance ministers' group. The PM was on a similar call the other night.

The vaccine funding announcement drew an excited response from the scientific community.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

The vaccine announcement was big news. I haven't been able to find out about where the money is going. But it means we will be able to ensure New Zealand has access to a safe vaccine ASAP. I know a lot of people in the space so was wondering who would get it.

It included \$7 million to the Vaccine Alliance group that distributes vaccines to developing countries, and New Zealand will be focused on ensuring Pacific neighbours can get it.

It can't be taken for granted that everyone will get the vaccine – this is a function of health being a for-profit business. So many lifesaving drugs have been discontinued because, although they save lives, people can't afford them. The question will be who develops it – who gets the first one and what conditions they put around its use.

There is another concern, as we saw with the antibody tests. The market got flooded with tests that were no good. There are clearly people in this just for the profit, and it is something you could be injecting into billions of people.

It is absolutely horrifying that this is how it works, and it shouldn't. In my area around antibiotic discovery, this is why we have a lack of antibiotics – there has been very little incentive to develop

new antibiotics.

I hope people think about this. It is one of the things the WHO is there for – connectedness and equitable outcomes. Yet, at the moment, they have to justify their existence and are having their funding cut. That is why it is good that New Zealand is putting the money into these organisations.

The issues remaining to be addressed as the country looked like it would come safely out of Covid were many and various.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

We will probably separate out, for example, the question of who can come here from other countries. With Australia, it is obvious. We have long-standing relationships as well as being two countries that have done well getting on top of the virus. The Pacific is another area where tourism is so important that that will be the next bubble off the rank. That is manageable.

What needs to sit behind that is the ‘smart border’, where we use tech, co-ordinate agencies and link with other countries to make a system where people are temperature tested and have quarantine where it is needed. There needs to be a consistent infrastructure for that.

When it comes to individual sectors of visa holders – there is a piece of work underway to get a more consistent approach there. You run the risk of people thinking different sectors are being treated differently, as with the exemptions regime. I don’t think that regime can be the thing that carries us forward.

There should be a Cabinet paper in the next week or so on that, especially if we move quicker down the levels. Really, level one is good hygiene with border restrictions – but we have learnt as soon as we deal with one issue another comes and that will be the level one issue.

Nevertheless, the move to Alert Level 1 looked likely – and possibly sooner than the initial date of 22 June.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

Our progress in beating the virus exceeded not only expectations but projections of experts, so we have had to recalibrate. We have already done that several times and the Prime Minister signalled we would look at it on 8 June.

New Zealand had one active case and many days in a row of no new cases since 19 May, again fuelling calls for an early move to Alert Level 1.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

I kept saying that having only one case was a good problem to have. We were in the margin of probability as to whether or not we had eliminated the virus, and the longer we waited before easing restrictions, the more certain we could be. The question was, when do you stop looking for the needles in the haystack? We needed to frame the discussion around how confident we could be. There was a Cabinet paper being prepared that would show a calculated percentage we had eliminated based on the models and the number of days we had had zero cases. Then moving to level one became a Cabinet decision about risk appetite.

I was talking to one of the modellers about how the risk of catching it was very low. We agreed we would be happy to do anything now, except perhaps join a mosh pit in an indoor stadium.

We needed to keep an eye on the overseas experience too. New Zealand was still stacking up well. Internationally, when some countries said Covid-19 was under control, it meant there were enough beds in the ICUs. Here and in Australia, Hong Kong and Taiwan, it meant no cases. There is a real bifurcation of countries and how long that lasts will be really interesting.

But there was no arguing with the consistent result.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

This week has just been another incredible run of zeros. I saw a tweet from a friend whose family is in Ireland where they had just had their first day of no deaths since 21 March. That was really quite

confronting. Ireland has a similar population to ours. They had their first case at a similar time, but for lots of reasons they couldn't do what we did. It's amazing to think that could have been us. Days and days of deaths.

CHAPTER 13

Alert level 2: week three

28 MAY–5 JUNE

Total cases to date: 1154

Total active cases: 8

Total deaths: 22

Total tests conducted:
275,852

28 May

A University of Otago study of New Zealanders working from home during lockdown suggests that most people were equally or more productive (73 per cent), and that many want to continue to work from home at least part of the time post-lockdown (89 per cent).

Sixth day in a row with no new cases.

29 May

The country has just one active case left.

Gatherings of up to 100 people are permitted.

31 May

Global cases pass 6 million.

1 June

Black Lives Matter marchers in Auckland violate social distancing rules. There are calls for marchers to self-isolate.

3 June

PM announces guidelines for Alert Level 1 – borders will remain shut; wash your hands.

* * *

The long-term impacts of lockdown and the New Zealand

response were already being assessed by a nation of 5 million epidemiologists, but they would remain opaque for some time. Lockdown had been the gamble that turned out to be a very safe bet. But what now? Would people continue to work from home, or would bosses want them back? If the former, how would service industries in CBDs survive? What measures would need to be taken to keep the virus out? Would kids continue happy back at school or start to cut up rough? As life returned to normal, would oppositional politics, where point-scoring is more important than progress, do the same? Or would the following days merely confirm Hegel's epigram: 'History teaches us that people learn nothing from history'?

Even if the country went to Alert Level 1 as soon as possible, there would still be anti-Covid procedures necessary to maintain the great result.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

Contact tracing would move to a different place in level one. We wanted it to continue but the imperative was reduced a bit. One of the things Cabinet would discuss on 8 June was the extent to which public health should oblige businesses to have a QR code available. You can't force individuals to use it. But as Jacinda has been wont to point out – we contact traced the first dozen to 20 people without any tech. We will still have to have testing – it has dropped down because people don't have the symptoms. What people will see when we move is a flip of the public advertising from encouraging people to unite against Covid to giving people confidence. There will be border restrictions and good hygiene, and that will be it.

The government continued to fine-tune its economic measures.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

We tweaked the wage subsidy and allowed the business loans scheme to operate longer. We originally wanted to tighten the criteria for the wage subsidy and had the 50 per cent limit on the basis that would be

reasonable. When we started talking to retailers, we realised we were excluding a lot of businesses that couldn't operate at level four or three and at two were struggling. Margins in retail are so small we were excluding the people we thought we were helping, so we extended it to an extra 40,000 businesses, meaning around 230,000 would be eligible for the extension, which was about half the number that got the original subsidy.

The tunnel was clear enough, but no one had switched on the light at the end.

Deborah Pead

Founder We Are Pead

The only thing that felt normal was the season. That was actually fabulous – the rains have started and the temperature has been dropping. That gives you a sense of life as normal. But everything else felt hopeless. I don't suffer from depression but have moments of gloom, and don't know whether it's seeing America on the brink of civil war or the ever-deepening hole ahead of us on the economy side. You would need the wisdom of Solomon to know what is right.

We can look at the death rate, and on the flipside you think there are another 4,979,000 people whose lives have been severely impacted. Thousands of people without jobs and more ahead. Businesses closing faster than you can open them – it just feels like we are in free fall. Very few clients were ready to commit and say yes and proceed with things. Auckland was like a ghost town. I had never worked harder in my life. The business is 20 years old, but it has felt like being in a start-up all over again. I've had to book couriers, which I haven't done for 18 years. I had to ask a junior how to book the boardroom. That used to be the kitchen bench.

Crises were piling up for even the most competent and in control of people.

Jenene Crossan

Founder and CEO Flossie

There was very little normal lately. All the trappings and fun and stimulation that were part of life have gone, and now there is a

massive amount of trauma and drama to wade through. I have realised I need to find ways of getting positive creativity in my life. I've just started an indoor netball team and am going to do a book. And I registered with Ngāi Tahu for checking my whakapapa.

The shock of the pandemic over, the reality crept up on people – the merest hopeful sign was welcome but all too short-lived.

Jim Boulton

Queenstown Lakes District mayor

It's never occurred to me I could get the virus. It wasn't Covid that I was worrying about when I woke up at 2am. It was the future of Queenstown. I was probably a bit more depressed approaching level one than I was at the start of this. People were sick and tired of the whole thing. They were over it and pissed off. They had gone through all this and paid the price. I think there had been a general feeling we would go back to normal when we came out of lockdown and we hadn't.

We had a really busy Queen's Birthday weekend, but the reality was we were soon back to pretty quiet again. There was a property auction with 21 places up for sale and 11 of them sold at auction or pretty well immediately after. Anecdotally, I was told quite a few people from outside the area had seen the opportunity to get a holiday home.

Nothing changed with regard to the migrants and the new poor. Up to 19,000 calls had been made to the council's help line. And this week Immigration set up a hub staffed by immigration folk, lawyers and consultants. It was primarily aimed at giving people some options. I thought there were a number of people who would and should leave the district as soon as there were flight options. We also had people who have been here a long time and lost their jobs but regard themselves as Kiwis. They have been paying taxes and playing their part in building the industry. A lot of them have family who have been born here. I wasn't sure we could just tip them out.

The ongoing Covid public health legacy was seen as a good thing.

Vicki Wallace

Real estate salesperson

Awareness did become ingrained into us. Although it had become a bit of a non-event with such low numbers, I think our habits had changed. As a life change going forward, we would keep up the sanitiser and hand washing. We had all become very sensitive and careful. Gary got a dose of the sneezes at a friend's dinner party last week and had to exit the room very quickly.

Even with the prospect of catching Covid diminishing daily, work continued to be done in the shadow of the virus.

Chris Farrelly

CEO Auckland City Mission

Rehousing has remained a priority, with about 250 people in emergency housing and hundreds of others with other agencies. We are deeply concerned about the next six months and whether the supply will be there. A lot of the properties we were offered at the start of the pandemic, such as former Airbnbs, have turned out to be only temporary, so that has proved to be not quite as straightforward as we first thought. Healing can only start when people have a permanent home. I think there will be a lot of shaking down over the next few months. We want to be nimble to grab places when they become available.

Soldiering on could actually add a lot of stress to an already stressful existence.

Siouxsie Wiles

Microbiologist

My cat Slinky got run over and killed and it was pretty traumatic. I was essentially completely useless since Wednesday and ended up taking some time off. Toby Morris and I were planning to do some work, and I was supposed to be doing *Nine to Noon* on the radio and a *Stuff* column and I ended up saying I couldn't do any of it. I was also supposed to finish my Marsden Fund application this week and that fell apart too. I spent two days in tears on the floor. The most I could manage was marking essays.

But, in some quarters, there was time to step back and acknowledge the work that had carried on through all alert levels.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

We have been having lots of 'Town Hall' catch-ups with our warehouse and office team members and they have been incredibly humbling. The people attending worked in areas where we needed to be physically conscious of safety and we had gone there to thank them. They spoke about how grateful they were that they were kept safe. It blew me away that they were wearing masks, sat one metre apart and all filed in in one direction and out in the same direction at the end. They talked about having older people with underlying health issues at home and their responsibility for them. How they would go home, get their work gear off and shower before they saw their families. It was very different to those of us who had the work-from-home roles. They told stories about being stopped by police when driving during lockdown and how proud they were when they could show their letters from Foodstuffs saying they were permitted to be out as essential workers. Normally we would share some kai on this sort of occasion – we couldn't do that, so gave them all a bag of Pams products. The only negative they mentioned was having to line up when they went to the supermarket when they were actually on the team. I explained that I and all the others had to line up as well.

The economic signals were frustratingly hard to read.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

There was huge demand for the government loan, and more people than I expected looking at the next tranche of the wage subsidy. We heard the economy was back, but it was back in a much smaller way. As far as we were concerned it was business as normal because we hadn't had any clients close up shop due to Covid. I had a couple of retail clients who had a surprisingly strong start at level two. On the face of it, things weren't too far away from pre-Covid. It was a pleasant surprise. I had quite dire expectations that may not come to pass. Although that is all on the assumption we don't get a huge second wave.

A mortgage broker told me in the middle of lockdown his business

was over. A few weeks later, he was saying he was busier than he was pre-lockdown. Everyone was still expecting prices to drop but it hadn't happened yet. Where I live, the building work cranked back into action at level two. Maybe it was a false start but on the face of it building and property seemed strong.

Consumers were making their own new normal.

Chris Quin

CEO Foodstuffs North Island

People were still shopping with much bigger baskets and planning their shops more. Eating-out alternatives were still growing in popularity. But cask wine was the trend we were struggling to keep up with. You couldn't double production of that overnight. We suspected it was the market that had been used to drinking at economic hospo locations going for the cost-effective alternative.

In the general tidying up some businesses insisted staff take that longstanding overdue leave – and perhaps get out to reignite domestic tourism. It was an opportunity to see the new normal up close.

Helen McCarthy

Producer Kerre McIvor Mornings, Newstalk ZB

I went to Waihi to see some friends on our enforced holiday. I didn't contribute a lot to the local economy by spending all the money I don't have since I've taken a pay cut. But not working has been nice, having had to work all the way through. I did butt heads with contact tracing when I went to pick up a book from the local library. There was a woman taking details and I said I would use the app, which I had downloaded. 'We have our own app, not the government app,' she said, and I did swear quite badly. Then I had to be really nice to her because I felt bad for swearing.

Already there was nostalgia for the relaxed pace of business under the restrictions of lockdown.

Kaiora Tipene

Funeral director

I kind of missed it. We were so busy now, probably because there was some normality and families could do things like dress their loved ones' bodies, which they hadn't been allowed to before. That slowed things down a bit. But everything was back in place – our chapel was reordered, our dressing room was running as normal. Night services hadn't started up again, but churches wanted to open their doors and then we would be able to do even more funerals.

Whenever we have been about to move levels, the pressure has gone on. This week I had a gentleman who had been a Harley-Davidson group leader. He had a few bikes and a few followers from all over the place, and we were informed there would be more than 100 bikes from around New Zealand wanting to be present for his service on Saturday when the level two rules still said no more than 100 people. I said I would assume there were 100 people in the chapel, but I said they could have more waiting outside with an overflow.

There was plenty of change afoot – even banks were not immune.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

We decided to officially cut ties with our Australian bank and move to a local one. They sounded very happy to have the business and we felt we were getting with the 'buy local' recovery programme. The banker at the new establishment asked if we would be looking for an overdraft and, when we outlined our modest hopes, she said she couldn't see a problem with that. I have been disappointed before, but we live in hope.

Even our courier services seem to have improved, with just one email from a customer saying their order had arrived smashed to pieces and what should they do. Doing our own deliveries, where we have been able to, had proved to be terrific. When we arrive, the feeling is a little like turning up to a war zone with supplies. The fact we are dropping off an order has been almost incidental. And the move to buying local is also having an impact on our products. As well as the new ice-cream, we have been contacted by a non-alcoholic booze company – whatever that is – wanting to do co-productions of drinks. Ultimately, we will do more than we thought we would for the month, with orders coming in quite consistently around the same level

per customer that they were prior to lockdown.

A new sense of freedom seemed to be inspiring people to explore new options.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury

Primary school teacher

The day after we moved to Kerikeri I was supposed to meet a local principal and she asked me to go in and work that day, which was a good start. They were still doing staggered break times, but I was with new entrants, so there was zero physical distancing, just a lot of sanitising and hand washing. We also had to do an elaborate end-of-day thing. Parents had to sign in if they came on site, so they were being discouraged from doing that. That meant we had to finish school a quarter of an hour earlier and organise the kids at pick-up points. Again, with mine being new entrants, I had to have someone assist to get them into the right places.

Lockdown was also a time to plan and prepare for a new way of running a business.

Mark Wallbank

Restaurateur

I gave birth to a new restaurant out of all this. For the past two weeks I was frantic getting the new Golden Nest at Woodpecker Hill set up. Our first day it was full, with people at the front for a quarter of an hour before we opened. The locals rolled in. Staff were amazing, going beyond the call of duty. The whole lockdown had been lots of fear and uncertainty, and to come through and get the restaurant open was quite overwhelming.

Organisations found themselves reorganising to meet new community needs.

Sam Johnson

Student Volunteer Army

We rapidly advanced our elderly tech project. The volunteer has a first meeting to find out what the person wants, what they have, what they would like: ‘How does the router work? What’s it got to do with the Wi-Fi? Netflix – what’s that?’ Then we put together a curriculum for them and every two weeks over three months the volunteer goes in to teach different aspects and it’s all done one to one.

It was a post-Covid opportunity and we made the most of it. We had a couple of weeks of recuperation after the manic time and needed to get back into the swing of things, which we have done with a totally reinvented organisation compared to what it was a month ago.

Work wasn’t the answer to every problem.

Sam Hardy

Mental health advocate

I quit my job this week and have felt a lot better even though I don’t have another one to go to. It has relieved a lot of the pressure I was under. I went back after a month and on the second day I just couldn’t do it. Now I’ve got to start looking for a job at the worst time ever, but it is important that I don’t put myself back in the same situation in a job that affects me mentally.

As the week drew to a close, the national conversation became focused on one thing.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

Naturally, there was that desire to move to level one, especially given that we had so many days of zero cases. Ashley Bloomfield was clear that we had broken the chain of community transmission. Epidemiologists wanted the level of certainty that you get with an extended period with no cases and we had done better than the models that, rightly, the epidemiologists wanted to keep testing.

Fortunately, the epidemiologists were coming up with the

answers people wanted to hear.

Juliet Gerrard

Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

The case for moving to level one was looking good for next week. The public could read zeros as well as anyone, but we also had two studies that had come up with the same result, which is always a good sign. Both modelling groups – one in Otago and one in Auckland - did things completely differently, so it was unusual for them to completely agree.

But both predicted it was 95 per cent certain that the virus had been eliminated and every day with no cases took you a little bit further down that road to certainty. It meant Cabinet could be given those probabilities and make their decision. One important thing was that all the work that had been done by New Zealanders wouldn't be wasted, because we all know what to do now in case we ever have to go back up. If there was an outbreak in Timaru, for instance, and they had to go to level three, then everyone would know what to do immediately.

But the public wasn't unanimous in its enthusiasm to get to Alert Level 1.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

I'm one of those people who thought there was science behind the levels. The worst thing for business would be the scenario where we would have to go back up the alert level chain. I was appalled, at level two, seeing everyone standing around together at the mall like it had never happened. It doesn't take much to keep some distance. One of the things I fear is that we get past this and everyone goes back to business as usual. We learnt as a country during Covid that some people were doing pretty critical jobs that we needed them to keep doing and they are paid shit. Middle classes in London clapping on their balconies were applauding people who get paid less than the living wage – let's do something about that.

There were some signs of how some of life's basics would be

restored.

Mark Stewart

Accountant

The only time I've noticed Covid lately has been shopping – particularly food shopping with the one-in one-out rule and the person squirting stuff in your hand. School sports has kicked back into action. Our youngest had his first full training session yesterday and my middle started his training last week. Given it's rugby training, I don't think social distancing is a big concern now. My wife has been able to visit her mother at the rest home more often. She has two sisters who live nearby and aren't allowed to visit. Jo is only allowed a 20-minute time slot and they will be under a lot of pressure to change that at level one. The retirement villages have definitely been quite strict.

If there wasn't normal around you, you could always go out and make your own.

Mark Wilson

Mental Health Foundation

We went to Hawke's Bay for Queen's Birthday and it was lovely to get stuck in a bit of Auckland motorway traffic and then get out into the countryside. We didn't feel like we had to spend up large in the provinces. It was more about getting out and doing the normal thing. We caught up with siblings and did the storytelling about life during lockdown, which is what you do when you meet people for the first time. But life isn't normal. There's a new normal. I was telling the kids how in 2060 they would be talking to their grandkids about the time in 2020 when they were in lockdown. They listened and the concept of something that far in the future made them stop. I realised it has been a huge deal.

Even the hardest pressed could grab a little bit of normality.

Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

It certainly hasn't felt like business as usual yet but this week I had a glimpse. My partner had come back from his holiday and last night I

got home at 6.30, which is early these days. I had some work to do, but I knew I could get it done if I got up early, so we had a normal night at home, and it did feel a little unusual in that regard. Then I got up at six and got on with things.

It was becoming clear that although people had been isolated, they were not necessarily lonely in lockdown.

Sam Johnson

Student Volunteer Army

All the grocery delivery and tech training stuff we do as volunteers is really about loneliness and isolation. But I was talking with Loneliness NZ this week and they said that the lockdown period had the lowest loneliness rates they had ever noticed because people were at home with more time and willingness to connect with neighbours. All the media encouraging people to visit their neighbours had a real impact.

Those whose businesses and incomes looked set to make it through exhaled.

Roger King

Co-director Hakanoa Handmade

Once we figured it was likely the business would survive – because that had been touch and go – we used the time well. I didn't encounter many people who said, 'What a nightmare.' I got to a yoga class. I went to my pub quiz – we booked after the earlier debacle. Life resumed its normal plodding momentum. My daughter and I took my dad to Rotorua to stay with my sister, but he sat down and looked around and decided it wasn't his scene and came back. We found our efforts to reinvigorate domestic tourism were paying off when we were told that if we wanted to do the night-time Redwoods Treewalk it would be an-hour-and-three-quarters wait, so we gave that a miss. But I wouldn't say life felt normal yet. It felt like something had happened. There was that slightly punch-drunk feeling, like you'd made it through an accident undamaged but slightly shaken.

With the prospect of a move to Alert Level 1 – not, strictly speaking, a ‘return’ as the country had never been at level one before – all but being taken for granted, it was easy to forget that the coronavirus could still be a confronting reality.

Bill Newson

National Secretary E tū union

The last thing I felt like having after my kidney stones was Covid-19, but I developed symptoms and ended up having to have a test. I'd had a really bad flu-like condition for a couple of days that I couldn't shake, and I thought: there is this Covid happening, maybe I should be sensible. Also, I had a big meeting with Air New Zealand management and representatives of some other unions in a few days. If I was going to be there coughing and spluttering, I at least owed it to people to let them know I had been tested and was okay . . . hopefully.

I had heard the only way to have the test was a swab up your nostril, but that was only one option. I could have a throat swab if I chose. Trying to be helpful, I asked the doctor what would be easiest for him. 'It would be easiest for me, if you made your mind up,' he said, so I went for the throat.

One complication was that, when I phoned ahead to the medical centre, I had symptoms, so they couldn't just see me and compromise their facility. I had to wait while they organised the appropriate gear. I wasn't allowed to do anything, including use their toilet, which was not an act of kindness for a man my age.

Again, I was very impressed with our health system at work. I had the test done at about 7pm on Sunday night in central Auckland, and the next day – which was the Queen's Birthday public holiday – I got a text saying the results were negative.

Once the new normal was launched, it could lead in surprising directions.

Sam Hardy

Mental health advocate

Since I had some time because I'd left work, I decided to ride down to Nelson to see my family for a week or so. It would be a great challenge for my OCD. The big thing would be that I wouldn't use the bathroom between leaving home and Nelson. My biggest OCD worry was about going on the ferry and having to tie my bike to anchors, which would mean touching parts of the bike and floor that are dirty,

so I planned to take disposable gloves. It will be good to see my dad – we’ve been talking a bit more. He’s a big motorcycle guy and we are looking forward to riding our bikes together.

Like many institutions and individuals, schools were now well into their post-lockdown new normal.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

It was like the children had never been away. They were completely settled and happy. We weren’t back to our normal syllabus – we were into the new normal that all the teaching staff had worked on during lockdown, based on kaitiakitanga and maramataka Māori.

Last week, the kids finished building the gardens that we will be using for our lessons, and the topsoil arrived, so they are ready to start planting. We made it a condition with whānau that if kids are sick, they keep them home, but everybody looked really healthy after this. They were more aware of Covid when they first came back, with lots of non-contact and distancing that had been instilled in them, but that soon went out the window and they have been hugging like normal.

I had never worried about catching it, not for an instant. We were too far removed in the Hokianga, and I didn’t let my brain go there. I was conscious of keeping my mind out of that Covid prison. I wanted to live above and beyond it.

Life could be turned upside down and be more normal than it had ever been.

Sido Kitchin

Magazine editor

My road trip to Wellington kept me buoyed for ages. That week we had Darcy’s eleventh birthday, and his world has turned back to normal with football practice and drum lessons and sleepovers. Cleo’s social calendar ramped up and she is back at school. I have still been enjoying the fact I can drop her at the train station and do Darcy’s drop-offs and pick-ups. Darcy said the other day, ‘It’s nice to see you more.’

I have missed the kids since they went back to school. It was an

amazing time in lockdown, incredibly special, and I will treasure those memories. I know there was lots of grief but, overall, it is being with Conrad and the children that I will remember about that time.

Perhaps how normal things felt depended on how you felt about things in general.

Michelle Sarich

Co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga

Life felt better than normal. I think we had taken on the learning we were meant to take on instead of just talking about it. It has enhanced what we already had and made us totally aware of it. There are times you are unappreciative of what is around you, but during the Covid break you had the opportunity to stand outside and see where you were. We have the gift of space and beauty.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. We may have been apprehensive to use that word because it had material connotations: you beautify things. But if you look at the landscape we have around us here, it is natural beauty to be appreciative of. A lot of people just look out the windows of their houses into another window in another house. We appreciated the space we had and how with space comes the ability to start up gardens and plant trees. If we want to live a life that is more conducive to looking after Papatūānuku, Covid has given us the opportunity to see that we can do it.

**On 8 June, New Zealand had
no active cases of Covid-19.**

**That day the world death toll
passed 400,000.**

**The New Zealand death toll
remained at 22.**

**There had been no new cases
in New Zealand for 17
consecutive days.**

**The country went to Alert
Level 1 at midnight.**

**Borders remained closed. All
other restrictions were
removed.**

Biographies

Jim Boulton ONZM, 68, Queenstown Lakes District mayor.

Jim and his wife, Karen, have lived at Lake Hayes for 38 years where they shared their bubble with daughter Victoria, while their son, James, resides in Auckland. Jim had a wide and successful commercial career before entering politics in 2016. He owned and ran the Shotover Jet company for 16 years before becoming a director and CEO of Christchurch Airport during the period of the earthquakes. For his work there and his contribution to the community he was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2014.

Rohan Cahill-Fleury, 30, primary school teacher.

Rohan is a relief teacher based in Palmerston North. During Alert Level 3, her bubble consisted of eight people including her partner and her cousin's family of six. Four of the bubble were working outside the home during level three including a doctor and a support worker. Rohan and her partner were in the process of building a tiny house on a trailer when the lockdown began and planned to move it once lockdown restrictions eased. They have two blogs, one on sustainability and one on travel.

Jenene Crossan, CEO and co-founder, Flossie.

Powered by Flossie is a software solution that connects to existing calendar management software to help enterprise hair and beauty businesses around the world. In 2016, Jenene was named Most Inspiring Individual at the New Zealand Innovation Awards. She has also placed as a finalist for the Women of Influence Awards, Woman of the Year, New Zealand Marketer of the Year and the international Veuve Clicquot Award. She normally lives between Auckland and London, and her bubble consisted of two of her three teenagers, a dog, two cats and her sheep-milking husband, Scottie.

Chris Farrelly, 68, City Missioner (CEO) of the Auckland City Mission.

Since Chris took up his role in June 2016, the Mission has undergone extensive service expansion and commenced construction of its integrated housing, health and social service hub – Mission HomeGround. Before taking up his role, Chris spent 25 years leading

health services in Northland. This included hospital and public health management roles with the DHB and 13 years as CEO of the Northland PHO, Manaia Health. Working in a cross-cultural environment has been a hallmark of Chris's career, which has included working closely with iwi Māori and learning te reo.

Professor Juliet Gerrard, 52, Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor. Juliet lives in central Auckland and is seconded from her day job as a professor at the University of Auckland to the role of Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor. Until the pandemic, she spent a lot of time in Wellington and travelling around New Zealand with some limited overseas travel. Her level-three bubble expanded from her solo level-four experience to include her partner, Carl. She continued to focus almost full time on advice to the PM on Covid-19, connecting with national and international experts to do so. Since moving from level four, she has enjoyed the odd change of topic and turned her limited attention to projects that were underway ahead of the pandemic – one on cannabis and one on fish.

Sam Hardy, 22, mental health advocate.

Sam was born in the UK and migrated to New Zealand as a child. He grew up in Nelson before moving to Wellington, where he now lives, at the age of 18. Until recently he worked in customer service in the insurance industry. Sam suffers from contact-themed obsessive-compulsive disorder. His bubble comprised himself and his partner Kayla Cook.

Sam Johnson, 32, chief executive and founder, Student Volunteer Army.

Sam is a prominent social entrepreneur from Christchurch, who mobilised 11,000 students to assist the clean-up following the Christchurch earthquakes. That organisation, the Student Volunteer Army (SVA), has continued as a nationwide volunteering movement. The SVA engages more than 50,000 people in its programmes each year across New Zealand. These are focused on volunteerism, guardianship and mentoring. Sam is a member of Westpac Bank Sustainability Panel and an Adjunct Fellow in the School of Education and Leadership at the University of Canterbury. His bubble consisted of himself and his husband, Tyler Brummer.

Roger King, 68, co-director Hakanoa Handmade, makers of ginger beer and syrups.

Roger's career ranges from record retailing to artist management to executive secretary to senior private secretary in the New Zealand Parliament, to late-night news on TV1, to event management, back to

artist management, to soft drinks and syrups manufacturer. He lives in Auckland's Grey Lynn where his bubble consisted of himself and – for several hours a day – his work partner Rebekah Hay.

Sido Kitchin, 49, magazine editor.

Sido was the award-winning editor of *Woman's Day* before Bauer Media abruptly closed its doors during the Covid-19 crisis. Her media career spans three decades, working in New Zealand and Australia as a journalist, entertainment publicist, magazine editor and publishing editorial director. In 2006, she returned home from running Channel Seven's publicity team in Melbourne to edit *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, before moving to *Woman's Day* in 2011. By 2020, she was the editorial director for Bauer's mass women's titles, including *Woman's Day*, *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* and *Australian Women's Weekly*. Sido lives in Western Springs, Auckland with her husband, Conrad, kids Cleo and Darcy, and dog Tui.

Helen McCarthy, 48, producer *Kerre McIvor Mornings*, Newstalk ZB.

Helen is an award-winning radio producer, country music fan, number one aunt and Bacardi lover. During her almost 25 years at Newstalk ZB, she has worked alongside Mike Hosking, Sir Paul Holmes, Larry Williams, Murray Deaker, Jack Tame and Marcus Lush. She currently produces the morning talk show with Kerre McIvor. Helen lives in Auckland's Point Chevalier and, when not listening to radio, enjoys thinking about exercising and binge-watching TV shows. She had a home bubble of one and a work bubble of eight-ish.

Bill Newson, 64, E tū union.

Bill is an ex-welder and National Secretary of E tū, New Zealand's largest private-sector union. Before Covid (BC) Bill lived in both Wellington and Auckland, and when level four descended he and his wife, Kerry Harrison, shared their bubble with their dog, Kelly, at Ōrere Point, south-east of Auckland. Thanks to a significant investment in online communications technology, Bill and his union staff were able to be fully operational, engaging with, and representing the interests of, union members as they experienced employment-related safety and income insecurity during the lockdown.

Deborah Pead, 60, founder of We Are Pead.

Deborah is CEO and founder of leading communications agency Pead PR – now We Are Pead. Deborah's skills and forthright approach to PR have seen her build, promote and protect the reputation of many brands, from start-ups like My Food Bag to multinational super brands like BMW and Nespresso. She is an expert at issues management so is

well-placed for opinion on how the Covid-19 issue played out. Deborah splits her time between her home in Auckland and the family farm in the Kaipara district. For lockdown, she and her husband, Carl Eb, were joined by their children and their partners. There were six adults and five high-energy dogs in their bubble.

Chris Quin, 54, CEO of Foodstuffs North Island

I live in St Heliers and my level-three bubble expanded from two people – me and my wife Sue – to three when our daughter moved in. I've been CEO of Foodstuffs North Island since September 2015 and enjoy the unique world of grocery and our co-operative structure where I get to work alongside 350 store owners refining our supermarket experience for New Zealanders. Prior to joining Foodstuffs, I spent 20 years at Spark where I most recently served as CEO of Spark Home, Mobile and Business. I'm chairman of business incubator The Icehouse and serve on the board of directors for Loyalty NZ.

Michelle Sarich, 52, co-principal Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga
Tēnā koutou!

He uri tēnei o Hokianga Whakapau Karakia

Ko Whiria te maunga

Ko Ngāti Korokoro, Ngāti Wharara, Te Pouka ngā hapū

Ko Pakanae te whenua

Ko Ngāpuhi te iwi

Greetings to all, I live in Koutu, Hokianga, I have seen 52 revolutions of the Earth around the sun and look forward to seeing many more.

Our isolation days began with 12 of us in Pakanae, on our tūrangawaewae, then seven of us moved onto our whenua in Koutu. I am one of the co-principals at Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hokianga.

Mark Stewart, 47, accountant.

Mark qualified with a Bachelor of Commerce in management and accounting in 2005. He also has qualifications in business studies, marketing and management. He worked as a production manager before becoming Business Publications Manager at Fourth Estate Holdings, followed by a marketing management role at *NBR*.

Mark started his accounting career in 2001 and incorporated The Practice Consultants Limited in early 2005. He often acts in an advisory role as clients transition through business sales or acquisitions, start-ups or re-structuring. He lives in Auckland's Long Bay, where his bubble included his wife, Jolene, and children, Campbell, Blake and Connor.

Francis and Kaiora Tipene, both 38, funeral directors.

Francis and Kaiora both hail from Northland. Francis started in the funeral industry more than 15 years ago when he got an opportunity to work as a duty driver in Auckland. From there his career started once he realised that his job was his passion and it grew to become a vocation. Kaiora soon became part of their successful partnership, which emphasises the values and tikanga of tangihanga, and is known around the world thanks to the TV series *The Casketeers*. Their bubble included their five sons and a live-in caregiver.

Gary and Vicki Wallace, 63 and 59, real estate salespeople.

In 2018, Gary and Vicki were inducted into the Bayleys Real Estate 'Hall of Fame' for having amassed more than \$1 billion in settled sales. Working together they earned the title of Bayleys' top residential salesperson for eight years running, as well as awards for the country's top salesperson across all market sectors between 2010 and 2016. They have also been recognised by the Real Estate Institute of New Zealand (REINZ) as Residential Salesperson of the Year. They live in Auckland's Remuera, where their bubble included themselves as well as one of their three sons and his partner.

Mark Wallbank, 50, restaurateur.

Mark is an award-winning restaurateur and *MasterChef New Zealand* judge. Mark began his restaurant career as a waiter in Wellington at the parliamentary restaurant Bellamy's. Other experience includes stints at London's historic Ivy and Caprice restaurants. Back in New Zealand, he opened Rocco in Auckland's Ponsonby in 2001. In 2013, he launched Blue Breeze Inn, which quickly became a Ponsonby Road stalwart, and he has since opened Woodpecker Hill in Parnell – 'the world's first oriental smokehouse' – which over lockdown reinvented itself as The Golden Nest at Woodpecker Hill. He shared his bubble with his partner, Marcelo.

Dr Siouxsie Wiles, MNZM, 45, microbiologist and Associate Professor at the University of Auckland.

At the Bioluminescent Superbugs Lab, Siouxsie and her team work to understand how bacteria make us sick and to find new medicines. Siouxsie is passionate about demystifying science, often collaborating with artists and animators to do this. She and her daughter even made a show about microbiology for kids. During Covid-19, Siouxsie joined forces with The Spinoff cartoonist Toby Morris to make the science of the pandemic clear and understandable. Siouxsie celebrated her forty-fifth birthday in lockdown in Auckland with her husband and teenage daughter.

Mark Wilson, 55, senior public relations and media officer, Mental

Health Foundation.

Prior to joining the foundation, Mark spent more than a decade working as a radio producer on a news and current affairs show, alongside many of New Zealand's top broadcasters. He has a lived experience of suicide and facilitates a bereavement support group in Auckland. He shares his bubble with wife Annabelle and their daughters Clara and Martha. He is a member of the Mental Health Foundation suicide bereavement advisory group and is passionate about educating people on the suicide loss experience.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PAUL LITTLE was born in Auckland in 1957 and lives in Northland, where his lockdown bubble included his wife and father-in-law. He has worked widely as a feature writer, newspaper columnist, magazine editor and publisher for more than 40 years, with diversions into radio and television. His books include several best-selling anthologies and ghost-written memoirs, the most recent being *Life as a Casketeer*. He won the 2020 Voyager Media award for Reviewer of the Year.

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Australia • Brazil • Canada • France • Germany • Holland • Hungary
India • Italy • Japan • Mexico • New Zealand • Poland • Spain • Sweden
Switzerland • United Kingdom • United States of America

First published in 2020

by HarperCollinsPublishers (New Zealand) Limited

Unit D1, 63 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, Auckland 0632, New Zealand

harpercollins.co.nz

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of New Zealand.

HarperCollinsPublishers

Level 13, 201 Elizabeth Street, Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia

Unit D1, 63 Apollo Drive, Rosedale 0632, Auckland, New Zealand

A 75, Sector 57, Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201 301, India

1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF, United Kingdom

Bay Adelaide Centre, East Tower, 22 Adelaide Street West, 41st Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M5H 4E3, Canada

195 Broadway, New York, NY 10007, USA

ISBN 978 1 7755 4169 1 (pbk)

ISBN 978 1 7754 9200 9 (ebook)

Cover design by Michelle Zaiter, HarperCollins Design Studio

Front cover image © Claire Eastham-Farrelly / Radio New Zealand